

Thunder Bay

'Angst' over police in Thunder Bay, Ont., 'diminishes' Canada: Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale

Policing is a provincial and municipal responsibility but feds are ready to step in if asked, Goodale says

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Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale says the federal government wants to work collaboratively and constructively with the Thunder Bay and Ontario to deal with concerns about racism and policing in the northern Ontario city. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

Canada's Minister of Public Safety says he's concerned Indigenous people in Thunder Bay, Ont., appear to have lost faith in the city's police service.

Ralph Goodale said the federal government is willing to respond to a request for help with policing the city, but he said that request must come from the municipality and the province to abide by jurisdictional protocols.

Last month chiefs representing more than 70 First Nations in northern Ontario [called on the RCMP to take over investigations into the deaths](#)

of Indigenous people in Thunder Bay. The call came after a seventh Indigenous teen was found dead in a river in the city.

"We all have to work together and when there are concerns of that nature and magnitude that are expressed, I think we all, within our respective authorities need to treat that seriously because this kind of angst diminishes the strength of the country," Goodale told reporters in Ottawa on Tuesday.

Two Indigenous teens — **Josiah Begg** and **Tammy Keeash** — were found dead in June in the McIntyre River in Thunder Bay, close to where the body of **Stacy DeBungee** was found in 2015.

- **Death, disappearance of First Nations teens reignite concern about police practices in Thunder Bay**
- **Thunder Bay, Ont., police face 'systemic review' of Indigenous death investigations**
- **First Nations man survived assault in Thunder Bay river, says woman who called police**

"To the extent the Government of Canada has institutions that can be of assistance, obviously we would want to collaborate in a constructive way," Goodale said. "But it is a jurisdictional issue that is first and foremost within the purview of the province."

If the city or Ontario "ask for or require federal support and cooperation, I'm sure the Government of Canada would want to respond constructively," he added.

Goodale's comments come on the same day a Statistics Canada report revealed **Thunder Bay had almost one-third of Canada's reported anti-Indigenous hate crimes.**

Thunder Bay police under investigation

Ontario's civilian police watchdog launched an unprecedented systemic review of Thunder Bay police last fall after numerous complaints that the police "devalue Indigenous lives, reflect differential treatment and are based on racist attitudes and/or stereotypical preconceptions about the

Indigenous community," according to the Ontario Independent Police Review Director.

That report is not expected until the end of the year.

"A police service cannot cure systemic racism," Thunder Bay Police Services Board Chair Brian McKinnon said a statement responding to the criticism. "We accept that our service has a role to play. The board and the service continue to support and participate in the ongoing [Office of Independent Review Director] review."

First Nations leaders are also asking for the Thunder Bay Police Services Board to be disbanded. The Ontario Civilian Police Commission, a provincial oversight body, has launched an investigation into the conduct of the board.

Meanwhile, Thunder Bay Police Chief J.P. Levesque is suspended on an unrelated matter. Levesque was charged by Ontario provincial police last month with breach of trust and obstruction of justice.

He is alleged to have disclosed confidential information relating to Thunder Bay Mayor Keith Hobbs. [**A first appearance in court in Tuesday**](#) set the next court date for July 18.