



Rainy River First Nations

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NEWS RELEASE

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OPP Commissioner Contradicted by Mountain of Correspondence – Stream of Unanswered Letters Order of the Day for First Nations

Rainy River First Nations: Chief Jim Leonard is calling for a retraction and apology for incorrect and misleading statements made yesterday by OPP Commissioner J.V.N. (Vince) Hawkes denying that the OPP declined to investigate the death of Stacy DeBungee, despite direct and repeated requests from the family and community.

“For the sake of clarity and truth-telling, I have delivered a letter to the Commissioner of the OPP detailing his refusals to answer me or the DeBungee Family and, ultimately, his refusal to conduct an investigation,” said Rainy River First Nations Chief Jim Leonard. “It is my expectation that the Commissioner will issue a public apology retracting any suggestion that the public statements of May 31, 2017 of the Grand Chiefs of Grand Council Treaty #3, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, as well as myself, were untrue or inaccurate.”

In a public statement issued yesterday, June 5, 2017, the Commissioner attempted to refute statements of NAN and Treaty 3 leadership that the OPP had refused to investigate the death of Stacy DeBungee. Commissioner Hawkes announced yesterday, for the first time, that the OPP *“in fact recently completed a review of the investigation relating to the death of Stacy DeBungee referred to OPP by the Chief of Thunder Bay Police Service. The report has been provided to the Thunder Bay Police Service.”*

The letter from Chief Leonard to the Commissioner delivered today, June 6, 2017 (attached), quotes a letter from Chief Levesque of the Thunder Bay Police Service who states that **“Commissioner Hawkes clearly expressed to me that he would not entertain such a request [for an investigation] during the course of an outstanding OIPRD investigation”**. Chief Leonard details the steady stream of ignored correspondence copied to the Commissioner, all letters that the Commissioner never answered. Chief Leonard takes the Commissioner of the OPP to task stating:

"In fact, as set out below, you remained silent in the face of no less than six separate letters sent to you from me and the family raising a potential OPP investigation. In each case, you would have had an opportunity to engage in respectful dialogue or at least simply acknowledge the correspondence and concerns of the DeBungee family and Rainy River First Nations. But you repeatedly and resoundingly opted for silence."

On May 31, 2017, First Nation leaders from Rainy River First Nations, NAN and GCT#3 called for the province to bring in an outside police force to investigate the deaths of three community members in the city's waterways, following the OPP's refusal last fall to conduct an independent investigation into the DeBungee death.

The body of 17-year-old Tammy Keeash, from North Caribou Lake First Nation, was found in the Neebing-McIntyre floodway on May 7, 2017. Less than two weeks later the body of 14-year-old Josiah Begg, of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, was also found in the river.

These followed the death of DeBungee, from Rainy River First Nation, who was found in the river on October 19, 2015. His death triggered a systemic review of racism in the TBPS by the Office of the Independent Review Director (OIPRD).

This alliance of First Nation leaders has expressed their lack of confidence in the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS) to the Ontario Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, formally requesting the intervention of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to investigate these three deaths.

Leaders have also expressed a lack of confidence in the Thunder Bay Police Service Board to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission (OCPC), requesting that the Commission exercise its powers to investigate and inquire into the administrative failures of the Board.