

RCMP should investigate deaths of Indigenous teens in Thunder Bay: MP

Ontario NDP MP Charlie Angus is pushing for a federal investigation in Thunder Bay.



NDP MP Charlie Angus is pushing for Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale to ask the Mounties to investigate the deaths of two indigenous young people in Thunder Bay, Ont. (ADRIAN WYLD / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

By The Canadian Press

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OTTAWA—Ontario MP Charlie Angus is urging the public safety minister to launch an RCMP investigation into the deaths of two Indigenous teenagers in Thunder Bay, Ont.

In a letter to Ralph Goodale released Wednesday, Angus said 70 First Nations leaders have also asked the Mounties to take a closer look at what happened to 17-year-old Tammy Keeash and 14-year-old Josiah Begg.

Keeash's body was found in the Neebing-McIntyre floodway early last month; the body of Begg was found less than two weeks later.

Goodale has said the matter is in Ontario's jurisdiction, but that Ottawa would "respond constructively" if local authorities asked for federal help.

"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 said Tuesday.

Those comments left Angus "disturbed."

"He will ignore the call from 70 First Nations leaders, whose communities are affected and whose children are dying, but he will listen to the city," the NDP MP said in an interview Wednesday. "How is that nation-to-nation?"

Angus accused the Liberal government of implementing policies that have put Indigenous children at risk.

"None of these children would be in Thunder Bay if the federal government was building proper schools and ensuring proper services," he said.

"These children have been left at very elevated levels of risk because of federal decisions so the federal government has a responsibility to these youth and to . . . the First Nations communities under federal jurisdiction."

Indigenous leaders say children are dying in urban centres like Thunder Bay because they are far from home under risky

circumstances in order to get education and health care services not offered in remote communities.

Last year, an Ontario inquest also explored the circumstances surrounding the deaths of seven First Nations high school students that occurred between 2000 and 2011 — all while they were living in Thunder Bay.

“They’re more vulnerable,” said Anna Betty Achneepineskum, the deputy grand chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, an umbrella organization representing 49 communities. “They’re out of the care of their parents.”

Statistics Canada reported Tuesday that Thunder Bay had the highest rate of police-reported hate crime in metropolitan areas in 2015. Incidents against Aboriginal Peoples in the city accounted for 29 per cent of all anti-Indigenous hate crimes reported across Canada that year.

Achneepineskum, who has lived in Thunder Bay since 1988, said she believes rates are even higher in the city, suggesting police mistrust contributes to a reluctance to report incidents.