



Public trust in police eroded in aftermath of Whitby altercation

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Trust. Its literal meaning is the ‘firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something’. It’s a small word that packs plenty of meaning.

For police officers, earning the trust of the public they’re sworn to protect is paramount. Trust is their stock-in-trade as the public has to know unequivocally that officers are going to do what’s right and honourable and, above all, uphold the law of the land.

Trust, we know from experience, is hard to earn, but is so very easy to shatter. The story of Whitby teen Dafonte Miller should serve as a wake-up call to not only the Durham Regional Police Service, but also to the Toronto Police Service as it pertains to public trust.

The story begins with what has been described as an altercation between Miller, 19, and off-duty Toronto Police Constable Michael Theriault on Erickson Drive in Whitby on Dec. 28, 2016. Miller was severely beaten and suffered serious injuries, including being blinded in one eye. Miller was subsequently charged with offences including assault with a weapon, theft and marijuana possession – all withdrawn in May of this year.

It was only after the Miller’s family contacted renowned Canadian human rights lawyer Julian Falconer did the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), an oversight agency that examines incidents of injury or death involving police, become involved in the incident. Neither the Toronto nor the Durham police services had previously reported the

incident to the SIU, although both services ought to have known a peace officer was involved.

The SIU investigation began in April and last Tuesday, July 18, it announced the arrest of Const. Theriault, charging him with aggravated assault, assault with a weapon and public mischief. The constable is currently suspended from his duties with pay. The allegations and charges have not been proven in court.

Durham Regional police spokesman Dave Selby noted in an interview that the onus was upon the Toronto police force to inform the SIU and not the Durham force. And, that after the SIU invoked its mandate to investigate, Durham has 'co-operated fully with their investigators'.

Falconer has alleged police have engaged in a "cover up" over the failing to report the incident. Whether it was the Toronto police's responsibility to report the incident to the SIU or Durham's, the fact remains those details were only presented to the agency at the insistence of Falconer. And that, sadly, can only lead to the erosion of the public trust in the police.