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## Police can't be allowed to evade the Special Investigations Unit: Editorial

Toronto police Chief Mark Saunders and the Ontario government must order independent investigations into why the SIU is being kept in the dark when officers are involved in serious allegations of injury.



A man, now 25, who accuses police of beating him in 2015 says he lost consciousness at one point and was left with a concussion and mental trauma. (STEVE RUSSELL / TORONTO STAR) | ORDER THIS PHOTO

By **STAR EDITORIAL BOARD**

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By now it's starting to sound sickeningly familiar.

A young Black man is allegedly severely injured by a Toronto police officer. But the Special Investigations Unit, which is supposed to investigate suspected incidents of serious injury, death, or sexual assault when police are involved, is not even informed.

It smacks of an attempted cover-up. And, disturbingly, it's the second such case to come to light in just over a month. These apparent efforts to hide serious events must stop or Torontonians will lose trust in their police force, if they haven't already.

The latest [case](#) to come to public attention involves a 25-year-old Black man, who has asked to remain anonymous. He alleges he was getting into a taxi to visit a friend on a Saturday night in November, 2015, when Toronto police officers responding to a report of gunfire in the area dragged him out of the cab, kned him in the back, beat him, illegally searched and groped him, and dragged him toward a police cruiser.

He says he lost consciousness at one point and was left with a concussion and mental trauma. In the end he was handcuffed but not charged with an offence.

Last week the SIU announced that Const. Joseph Dropuljic has been charged with the alleged assault of the man, who was just 23 at the time.

How did the SIU find out about the incident? Not from Toronto police, as they should have, but from the Office of the Independent Police Review Director after it was informed about the case almost a year after the incident by the African Canadian Legal Clinic.

There is much that is concerning here.

First, the public must be confident that the SIU will be informed of serious injuries of citizens when police are involved, as the law clearly requires. Cases cannot be swept under the carpet, and police officers cannot seem to be covering up for each other.

Second, the ability of the SIU to investigate is seriously compromised when there is a lengthy delay in them being informed.

The matter is even more worrying considering this allegation follows charges of aggravated assault, assault with a weapon and public mischief laid by the SIU last month against Toronto police constable Michael Theriault and his brother, Christian Theriault.

By now the details of the incident involving Dafonte Miller, who is 19 years old and Black, are well known. He says he was walking with friends on the night of last Dec. 28 in a neighbourhood in Whitby when he was involved in a confrontation with two men, one of whom identified himself as an off-duty police officer.

Miller ended up with serious injuries, including a broken nose, broken orbital bone, fractured right wrist and an eye so badly damaged it may have to be surgically removed.

Still, the SIU was not informed by the Durham force, where the alleged assault took place, or by Toronto police, who knew about the incident. Instead it was left up to Miller's lawyer, Julian Falconer, to alert the SIU in April.

After a public outcry, the two police forces launched investigations into how they handled events surrounding Miller's beating.

But there are problems with those investigations. The Toronto police, for example, are being investigated by Waterloo regional police and the report will be made public. But one police force investigating another is not a truly independent investigation. Worse, the Durham police are handling their own investigation and its chief has not said whether he will make the final report public.

Two things should happen now that there appears to be a frightening pattern involving young Black men.

First, Toronto police Chief Mark Saunders should launch a second investigation to be conducted by an independent authority, such as a judge, into why the SIU was not informed of the latest case.

Second, the Ontario government should step in by launching its own investigation into why police forces are seemingly breaking the law to hide troubling events from the SIU.

The reports could help point the way to ensuring that no Ontario police force fails to report a serious injury of a citizen to the SIU again. That type of true accountability is the best way to ensure that similar incidents don't occur in the first place.