

# Thunder Bay public meeting on police practices the 'beginning of a discussion' says First Nation chief

**Rainy River Chief Jim Leonard says he hopes the ongoing OIPRD review will lead to lasting change**

By Matt Prokopchuk, [CBC News](#) Posted: Sep 12, 2017 6:30 AM ET Last Updated: Sep 12, 2017 6:30 AM ET



Rainy River First Nations Chief Jim Leonard says a public meeting in Thunder Bay is an opportunity to start a discussion. (Nick Sherman/CBC)

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The chief of Rainy River First Nations says an upcoming public meeting in Thunder Bay, Ont., about police practices as they relate to Indigenous people in the city is a chance to have some meaningful conversations.

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"I think it's the beginning of a discussion," Jim Leonard told CBC News. "I think people have to talk about problems in Thunder Bay."

The meeting, scheduled for September 25, is being hosted by the Ontario Independent Police Review Director. It's part of the police watchdog's ongoing review of the Thunder Bay Police Service, over allegations of systemic racism.

The wide-ranging probe is examining things like whether the Indigenous population is over-policed or under-policed, whether missing persons and death investigations involving Indigenous people are conducted in discriminatory ways and the adequacy of training and education supervisors and front-line officers receive.

Leonard filed the complaint that led to the OIPRD's sweeping review after police quickly ruled that [the death of one of his community members](#) was accidental. He said he hopes the probe will bring meaningful change.

- **Thunder Bay police not perfect but not in crisis, new acting chief says**
- **[Missing, murdered Indigenous women cases face systemic review in Thunder Bay, Ont.](#)**

"I hope there's going to be some recommendations to make things better ... from both the police and the general community to help them get together," he said. "Let's make it work."



Ontario Independent Police Review Director Gerry McNeilly says the meeting will be an opportunity to hear directly from people in Thunder Bay. (CBC)

The public forum will allow the police review director to gather "perspectives, suggestions and guidance" from residents about community relations and policing in Thunder Bay, according to a press release announcing the meeting.

Topics scheduled to be discussed include perceptions and realities of police-Indigenous relations, whether the community feels there is racism and bias in policing, and successes in, and barriers to, effective policing.

Police review director Gerry McNeilly and his team have been to Thunder Bay "almost two dozen times," according to a written release, and have met with individuals, First Nations leaders, Indigenous organizations and members of the Thunder Bay police and its board.

The police services board is the subject of a separate investigation by the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. Both the police service and the board have said they will cooperate with the respective investigations.

- **Senator Murray Sinclair, chair of TRC, named as Thunder Bay police board investigator**

The public meeting in Thunder Bay will be the first open forum related to the OIPRD review, according to a police review director spokesperson.

Leonard said he's personally met with the directorate's staff several times.

"I'm quite happy with the process," he said. "They seem to be reaching out to First Nations in the area and talking to them about the problem of racism within Thunder Bay."

"It seems to be going very well."

With files from Jody Porter