

New

Calls mount from Indigenous leaders for Thunder Bay police chief to resign

Ontario watchdog finds 'substantial' deficiencies in death investigation of Stacy DeBungee

By Matt Prokopchuk, [CBC News](#) Posted: Mar 05, 2018 3:08 PM ET Last Updated: Mar 05, 2018 3:08 PM ET

First Nations leaders in northern Ontario are calling for the resignation of Thunder Bay, Ont., Police Chief J.P. Levesque in the wake of a report that slammed the local force for its handling of a 2015 death investigation of an Indigenous man.

- [FIFTH ESTATE: 'Neglect of duty' found](#)
- [Key witnesses not interviewed](#)

At a press conference in Thunder Bay Monday, the grand chiefs of two territorial organizations that represent over 75 First Nations in northern Ontario joined the brother of Stacy DeBungee, whose body was found in the McIntyre River in 2015. Also speaking were past and present chiefs of, and legal counsel for, Rainy River First Nation.

DeBungee was from the First Nation about 40 kilometres west of Fort Frances. His brother, Brad, as well as community leaders, had called for the Ontario Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) to look at the case after their own investigation found the Thunder Bay Police Service's efforts lacking.

"There's no oversight, no supervision," said Rainy River Chief Robin McGinnis, while calling for Levesque's resignation or for the police services board to fire him. He added that the investigation into DeBungee's death — which the OIPRD said had "substantial" deficiencies — was taking place during [the inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students](#) in Thunder Bay.

"How can you let that happen when there's an inquest going on?" McGinnis asked Monday. "And to not even attempt to do an investigation because an Indigenous man is dead in the river."

Thunder Bay police have not publicly responded to the report, citing ongoing issues of confidentiality and the privacy interests of all parties involved. A spokesperson told CBC News on Monday that Levesque is not expected to comment on calls for his resignation, while the police services board said it still has to review the OIPRD's report and formally meet.

Levesque previously told *The Fifth Estate* that he tries not to "micromanage" and to let investigators "do their job."

'I felt I was treated wrong'

Stacy DeBungee's brother also told Monday's press conference he "wouldn't be here if things were different."

"I felt I was treated wrong," he said of his interactions with police when they were investigating Stacy's death, feeling that investigators were dismissive. "It hurts to see the treatment of the family ... because we got no closure to the way that [Stacy] was brushed aside like there was nothing really there for them to look at."

Several people said there appeared to be little supervision or policies or processes in place to ensure an effective investigation.

"The chief of police should have directed that ... you treat deaths with suspicion until [otherwise]," former Rainy River chief Jim Leonard said. "It's obvious in this case that somebody made the assumption that it's just another drunk Indian rolling in the river."

The officers named by the OIPRD rejected that claim in interviews recorded in the report.

"Whether they're First Nations or Caucasian or any other type of race, we do our work based on a want to do what's right," one officer was quoted as saying.

Calling for 'systemic changes'

Indigenous leaders on Monday called for changes to the local force, including more First Nations representation.

- [Thunder Bay police to revamp recruiting, training](#)
- ['Indigenous voice' added to police board](#)

"Any police service, it has to reflect the community that it serves," Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said. "We know that in Thunder Bay, there's a growing Indigenous population ... but we don't see that in the Thunder Bay Police Service."

"If they're serious about making these changes and if they're serious about addressing the issues that we're raising here today, they will take those steps."

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