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Independent review of Ojibway man's death shows 'deficiencies' in Thunder Bay police investigation

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APTN News

An independent review verifies police misconduct during the investigation of a Rainy River First Nation man's death in Thunder Bay, according to a law firm representing the man's family.

The body of Stacy DeBungee, an Ojibway man, was pulled from Thunder Bay's McIntyre River in October 2015. Within hours of his body's discovery, and before an autopsy, Thunder Bay police issued press releases ruling out foul play and declaring the death "non-criminal."

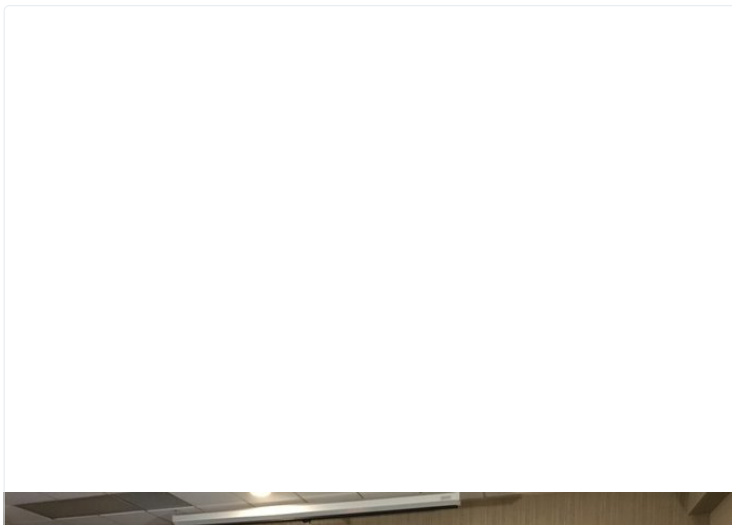


The Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) has conducted an investigation into police conduct. A copy of the 126-page report, provided by Falconers LLP, states the investigation was "inadequate" and concludes there's enough evidence to substantiate neglect of duty and misconduct by the lead investigator in the case.

"As (retired deputy police chief Andy Hay) acknowledged, one would have reasonably expected that investigators would be particularly vigilant in ensuring that the investigation of the sudden death of an Indigenous man found in the river was thorough and responsive to the community's concerns," reads the report. "Unfortunately, the opposite was true here."

A press release from Falconers LLP says the report chronicles how police "failed to take the most basic investigative steps" including protecting the scene, interviewing witnesses and seizing evidence.

"Leadership right up to the chief of police are identified and a trail of 'organizational deficiencies' are laid out in the report," states the release.



 **Willow Fiddler**
@WillowBlasizzo


OIPRD findings bittersweet says @NANComms lawyer Julian Falconer at press conference for Stacey Debungee death investigation from 2015. of family concerns that @tbpsmedia didn't investigate properly. The family is vindicated, Falconer said. #tbay #police #racism

10:42 AM - Mar 5, 2018

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Thunder Bay police said it would not comment on the report because they are legally barred from doing so under the Police Services Act.



 **Willow Fiddler**
@WillowBlasizzo

Deficiency after deficiency after deficiency says former Rainy River First Nation Chief Jim Leonard of the 126-page report from @OIPRD_BDIEP of misconduct allegations of Denbungee death investigation by @tbpsmedia #tbay #police #racism

10:46 AM - Mar 5, 2018

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First Nations leaders, including Rainy River First Nation Chief Robin McGinnis and former chief Jim Leonard, are now calling for Thunder Bay police chief J. P. Levesque to step down.

"This OIPRD Report not only confirms what we worried is going on, but it is now clear things are much worse," McGinnis states in a press release. "The degree of incompetence and indifference to the lives of First Nations is mind-boggling."

"It's obvious in this case that somebody made the assumption that it's just another drunk Indian rolling in the river," said Leonard. "And that's the way the whole investigation was conducted from day one until today. Business as usual."

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