



**RAINY RIVER
FIRST NATIONS**

PRESS RELEASE

FIRST NATIONS LEADERS CALL FOR THUNDER BAY POLICE CHIEF'S RESIGNATION IN WAKE OF SCATHING OIPRD REPORT

THUNDER BAY, ON (March 5, 2018) – First Nations leaders are calling for the resignation of Thunder Bay Police Service (“TBPS”) Chief J.P. Levesque as a scathing report by the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (the “OIPRD”) has substantiated allegations of neglect of duty and discreditable conduct against members of the Thunder Bay Police Service.

The OIPRD’s Investigative Report into the death investigation of Rainy River First Nations member Stacy DeBungee found substantial deficiencies in the investigation, including failure of basic policing documented throughout the 126-page report released today. First Nations leaders have joined in Thunder Bay to call for Chief Levesque’s resignation. Failing which, they will ask the TBPS Board to intervene.

The OIPRD found overwhelming evidence to support the allegation that Detective Shawn Harrison and Detective Constable Shawn Whipple prematurely concluded that Stacy rolled into the river and drowned without any external intervention, substantiating allegations of discreditable conduct. The OIPRD further substantiated allegations of neglect of duty against Detective Harrison and Detective Constable Whipple, and Acting Inspector Susan Kaucharik, citing “substantial” deficiencies in the investigation that “deviated so significantly from what was required.”

Bradley DeBungee, brother of Stacy DeBungee:

“I knew from the day they found my brother that we were being treated unfairly. I knew that they treated us like we were unimportant. This Report doesn’t ease the pain of my brother’s death, but it confirms that our family’s fears were legitimate. The life of Stacy wasn’t even worth the basic steps of an investigation. I hope that the information in the Report creates real change – because no one should ever be treated like they don’t matter when they are just trying to get answers about the death of a loved one.”

Rainy River First Nations Chief Robin McGinnis:

“Rainy River First Nations will continue to support the DeBungee family in their very difficult journey. Since Stacy’s death in October, 2015, we have challenged authorities to work with us, but we have been stonewalled at every turn. This OIPRD Report not only confirms what we

worried is going on, but it is now clear things are much worse. The degree of incompetence and indifference to the lives of First Nations is mind-boggling.”

“Chief Levesque needs to step down to protect any chance for credible change in the Thunder Bay Police Service. If the Chief of police is incapable of understanding the importance of stepping

down then it is up to the Thunder Bay Police Services Board to fulfill its mandate and to fire the chief of police. It is shocking that against the backdrop of the Seven Youth Inquest that involved serious and credible allegations of police incompetence in investigating the drowning of indigenous youth - that not two weeks after the start of the Inquest, the Chief of Police would allow yet another investigation to be completely bungled. This Chief needs to go”.

Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh, Grand Council Treaty #3:

“Grand Council Treaty #3 will continue to support its communities in their efforts to achieve accountability and ensure respect for their members. When I first heard of this tragedy, my first thought was, ‘why am I not surprised?’. This Report once again proves that Indigenous people need to stand up and be heard against the everyday realities of systemic racism in this country's policing. We all have a responsibility to advocate for real change. We must also be willing to join those non-Indigenous leaders who are prepared to partner with us in real change. Unfortunately, what we are seeing in Thunder Bay is a steadfast stubborn resistance to any kind of substantial change to ensure that our people are respected.”

Former Rainy River First Nations Chief Jim Leonard:

“We started this process when I was Chief because we believed that we had to support a family who had suffered the ultimate tragedy in the loss of their loved one. This journey has demonstrated that far from this case being unique, there is an ongoing pattern of racism and neglect of our people by the very institution in Thunder Bay that is supposed to make people safe. As a former Chief and a named complainant in the OIPRD proceedings, I fully support the call for the resignation of Police Chief Levesque.”

“The degree of incompetence and indifference that was displayed regarding Stacy's death is of course unacceptable in any scenario, but to have all of this happen while national attention was already focused on the Inquest that had started a mere two weeks earlier, makes it that much worse. I repeat our original call to the Thunder Bay Police Service Board to work with us to create real change. We wrote the Thunder Bay Police Services Board in October, 2016 offering to work with them - I was truly disappointed to receive a letter in December, 2016 from the Chair of the Board, Chair Dojack, refusing to meet with Chief and Council. For a public body to cut themselves off from the very people that are suffering as a result of police incompetence is frankly inconceivable. If the Board today is unable to do the right thing regarding Police Chief Levesque, then maybe this Board needs to be disbanded.”

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