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Doug Ford demanded changes to his OPP security detail, according to court filings

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Ontario Premier Doug Ford, seen here at a premiers' meeting on Dec. 6, 2018, demanded changes to his security detail shortly after taking office, according to e-mails filed in court.

GRAHAM HUGHES/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Shortly after becoming Premier, Doug Ford demanded changes to his Ontario Provincial Police security detail because he didn't trust the rotating cast of officers, according to newly disclosed court records.

Internal police e-mails filed in Ontario Divisional Court also show that the Premier's office was interested in retrofitting a van for his travels, relaying a \$50,000 cost estimate to the OPP.

Ontario Provincial Police Deputy Commissioner Brad Blair submitted the internal e-mails to bolster his claim that Mr. Ford and his office have interfered in police operations. The senior officer is asking the courts to order the province's Ombudsman to review the hiring of Mr. Ford's friend, Toronto Police Superintendent Ron Taverner, as the next OPP Commissioner.

Deputy Commissioner Blair, who was also a front-runner for the position, went public with his concerns in December, alleging that "inappropriate political interference or cronyism" could impact OPP operations. In his filings and correspondence, he alleged the Premier's office directed a sole-sourced "off-the-books" request for the OPP to refit an executive van for the Premier's use. He further alleged the Premier relayed to police that he wanted a meeting with then-OPP Commissioner Vince Hawkes to ask him to replace a rotating security detail for Mr. Ford with permanent bodyguards, and if not, "perhaps a new Commissioner would."

Deputy Commissioner's Blair's most recent court filings, made on Feb. 15, include internal e-mails about Mr. Ford's concerns and an estimate for the van overhaul. The Premier's office says, however, he should not be accessing those records and making them public.

"It is extremely troubling that Mr. Blair is apparently using his office to obtain confidential information and documentation and then filing such documents in a public court record to further his own personal agenda in the court process he himself initiated," said Simon Jefferies, a spokesman for the Premier.

In an e-mail to The Globe, the spokesman added that the allegations about off-the-books purchase requests by the Premier's office "are a complete fabrication by Mr. Blair and are categorically false."

NDP MPP Taras Natyshak released a statement saying the van proposal is "wildly inappropriate" when the government is implementing budget cuts elsewhere. "It's the gravy train for Ford, and cuts for everyone else."

The OPP e-mails filed in court show that in mid-July, just a few weeks after the Progressive Conservative government had taken power, Mr. Ford expressed concern about his shifting cast of police-assigned bodyguards. In an e-mail to his supervisor, an officer assigned to Mr. Ford relayed the Premier's displeasure as he prepared to travel to a first ministers meeting.

"[W]hat ... is going on? I'm going to Moncton with 3 officers I don't know. This is too much. ... I keep getting new people in the truck. I just want my own protection team," Sergeant Terrance Murphy wrote what Mr. Ford told him after he picked him up to go to the airport. He reported the Premier saying he had no faith in newly assigned bodyguards.

"I have not formed the trust with them. I have asked for my own detail of officers who I trust already. It feels like I'm not being heard, like I'm getting f***ed around by the OPP, and I'm getting more pissed off," the e-mail reads.

"I'm going to call the Commissioner and sort this out," the Premier then said, according to the e-mail.

In the July e-mail exchange, the police officer quotes Mr. Ford as saying he wanted to meet the then-OPP Commissioner "so he can see how serious I am about this. If he can't sort this out, then maybe a new Commissioner can make it happen."

The Premier's office defended Mr. Ford's request and again took issue with the release of internal e-mails related to security.

"These types of requests are made by politicians of all stripes, at both the federal and provincial levels of government," said Mr. Jefferies. "Internal police reports are by definition, in our opinion, highly confidential documents."

The Globe and Mail reported this week a senior government official warned Deputy Commissioner Blair in December about publicly disclosing any more sensitive OPP materials as part of his court bid.

The OPP e-mail exchanges filed in court further reveal that on Nov. 21, when the hunt for a new commissioner was concluding, the OPP received an e-mailed cost estimate of \$50,696 for the interior redesign of an executive van for the Premier's potential use.

A Mississauga company called A1 Mobility had provided this estimate – which involved installing WiFi, leather seats, a mini-fridge, a couch and a TV – to an executive assistant in the Premier's office, who in turn relayed it to the police force.

Deputy Commissioner Blair has alleged in court documents that this cost estimate was relayed in a potential contravention of police procurement policies. The Premier's office says these assertions are "categorically false."

"As has been repeatedly stated by the Premier, he requested the OPP look into the possibility of obtaining a cost-effective used van for purposes of working and travelling the province," said Mr. Jefferies. "The e-mails sent to the OPP from a member of the Premier's Office staff are not an official procurement of a van, instead they are a cost estimate and reveal an effort to minimize expense."

Mr. Jefferies said the retrofit has not happened. OPP Staff Sergeant Carolle Dionne said the police force would not comment about matters that are being litigated, including what happened to van-retrofit request that was received by the OPP.

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