

Personalization to Ford's van would cost taxpayers \$50K, document suggests

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Published Monday, February 25, 2019 2:55PM EST

Last Updated Monday, February 25, 2019 8:29PM EST

The proposed features of Ontario Premier Doug Ford's customized van, including a 32-inch television, a mini fridge, a reclining leather sofa, and black leather captain's chairs, totaled to more than \$50,000 of taxpayers' dollars, according to a document filed in court.

The documents were filed in Ontario Divisional Court in the wake of Ontario Provincial Police deputy commissioner Brad Blair threatening to sue Ford, accusing him of defamation.

A notice of intent to sue the premier was filed by Blair's lawyer Julian Falconer last month.

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Blair claims the premier damaged his reputation by accusing him of breaking the Police Services Act when the deputy commissioner spoke against the hiring of a Ford family friend for the service's top job.

Ron Taverner was named the new commissioner of the OPP back in November 2018. Blair, who was a candidate for the job, has publicly criticized the appointment of Taverner.

A letter sent by Falconer to Ford on Jan. 23 said the premier's remarks regarding his client are "detrimental."

He noted the statements Ford made "would lead the average person to believe that deputy commissioner Brad Blair has been found to have committed misconduct under the Police Services Act."

"Specifically, it is alleged that you intentionally, deliberately and maliciously made statements you knew or ought to have known to be false," Falconer wrote. "The preparation, distribution and publication of these defamatory words have caused extensive harm to deputy commissioner Blair's professional and personal reputation."

The notice of intent also follows Blair's lawyers claiming the government neglected to reply to four letters seeking clarification on whether or not Blair was in fact under a Police Services Act investigation. The four letters were sent in December 2018.

In the letters, Falconer wrote that his client received "no notice that he is under investigation and/or that a complaint has been filed for any alleged violations."

"It is surprising and troubling that you have not provided a timely response to, much less the courtesy of even a simple acknowledgement of the various correspondences sent on behalf of the commissioner, now deputy commissioner, of the OPP," Falconer wrote in one of his follow up letters sent to the government.

"We hope and expect to receive responses from you promptly."

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Ontario Premier Doug Ford speaks to media at Queens Park, in Toronto on Monday, Nov. 19, 2018. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Chris Young

Blair was sent a letter from the Deputy Minister of Community Safety Mario Di Tommaso on Dec. 28, 2018 pertaining to the matter.

The letter reminded Blair that public servants take an oath of office to maintain confidentiality regarding information that has come to their knowledge by reason of their being a public servant and that a police officer is prohibited to speak with the media, without proper authority, "in respect of any matter connected with the police force of which the officer is a member."

Di Tommaso claimed in the letter that Blair's lawyer provided information regarding the OPP to the media.

Once the notice of intent to sue was filed, a document, which includes internal OPP emails, was handed over to the court. The document contains new details on Blair's allegations that Ford's chief of staff asked the OPP to purchase a "larger camper-type vehicle" and have it modified, with the costs "kept off the books."

The cost to taxpayers for the modifications was pegged at \$50,696.21, including tax but not including the cost of the van itself, the document indicates.

A statement regarding the van was issued by the premier's office on Monday.

"The emails 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," the statement read.

Also included in the documents are internal OPP emails from July 2018 that outline an interaction between the premier and a member of the service.

In one email, an officer notes Ford "became very quiet, as if upset" after learning of the security team assigned to him during a trip.

"This morning when I arrived at the Ford residence to pick up the premier, he exited his residence with his bags and walked towards the waiting DPIS vehicle," the officer described in the email included in the court document. "It was obvious he was upset."

The officer went on to detail the rest of the encounter but noted it was to "the best of (his) recollection." He wrote that the premier used obscenities at the time, saying "I'm getting f***** around by the OPP and I'm getting more pissed off."

"I'm going to Moncton with three officers I don't know? This is too much. I haven't asked for a lot. I've been supportive. I keep getting new people in the truck. I just want my own protection team. It's not a lot to ask I don't think."

Ford's office said internal police reports are "by definition, in our opinion, highly confidential documents."

"It is extremely troubling that 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."

In a statement issued Monday, the Official Opposition slammed the Conservatives for the proposed van modifications.

"It is absolutely shameful that Doug Ford is telling Ontarians to tighten their belts and accept deep cuts to the services families depend on, while he is spending their money on a swanky customized personal pleasure wagon," NDP MPP Taras Natyshak said in the statement.

Blair's case is expected to be heard in April.

Document filed in Ontario Divisional Court:

To print the document, click the "Original Document" link to open the original PDF. At this time it is not possible to print the document with annotations.



Interim OPP Commissioner Brad Blair is seen in a 2013 photo. (CNW Group/Ontario Provincial Police)



An outline of a proposed van for Premier Doug Ford sent to the Ontario Provincial Police is seen from a court document.

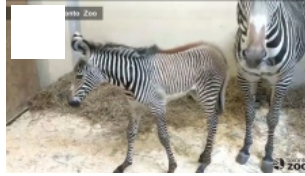
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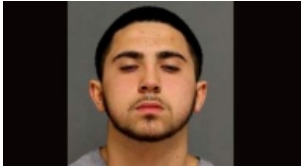


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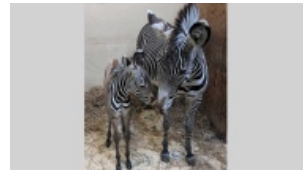


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