

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, June 14, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA CHIEFS COUNCIL ISSUE STATEMENT TO SUPPORT THE FAMILIES RAISING CONCERNS REGARDING NINE SUDDEN DEATH REINVESTIGATIONS, INCLUDING THE DEATH OF JORDAN WABASSE OF WEBEQUIE FIRST NATION

THUNDER BAY, ON: Responding to the family concerns raised earlier last week on the approach used in the reinvestigation of the sudden deaths of nine Indigenous People in Thunder Bay—the Matawa Chiefs Council (MCC) offered the following statement:

“The Matawa Chiefs Council supports the recommendations from the Ontario Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) for the reinvestigation into nine sudden deaths involving Indigenous people. Reinvestigations include three First Nation’s youth from the Seven Youth Inquest including our own Webequie First Nation youth Jordan Wabasse who tragically died in 2011 while pursuing his secondary education in Thunder Bay.

We find it deeply concerning that the families and legal counsel have expressed significant concerns regarding the Thunder Bay Police Services’ (TBPS) implementation of the 44 recommendations from the OIPRD report, Broken Trust: Indigenous People and the Thunder Bay Police Service. Most significant is the concern shared by the families and supported by the MCC is the lack of transparency of the reinvestigation process. The OIPRD recommended the creation of a multi-discipline investigation team to which the TBPS unilaterally responded by adopting a three-tiered governance structure.

TBPS Chief of Police Sylvie Hauth and legal counsel currently compose the Executive Governance Committee and this raises questions about how transparent and independent the reinvestigation process really is if Chief Hauth is directly involved. Family members have asked whether Chief Hauth has recused herself from this aspect of the Executive Governance Committee’s work to avoid any conflict and it is unacceptable to the MCC that the families have been met with silence as stated on June 8, 2021. The MCC are calling for:

- *The TBPS to implement OIPRD Recommendation’s 1, 2, and 4 which include recusing Chief Hauth where her role is in potential inappropriate conflict of ensuring independent reinvestigations;*
- *The implementation of Recommendation 3 which adopts a protocol for determining whether other TBPS sudden death investigations should in reinvestigated;*
- *The implementation of Recommendation 5 which calls for an external review process since it’s already been two-and-a-half years since the release of the OIPRD report; and*
- *All parties to rectify this situation and work towards more meaningful engagement with the families and legal counsel.*

The MCC recognize and acknowledge the long-standing grief for the families whose loved one’s deaths are being reinvestigated and we hope that the reinvestigation team will move towards working with the families in a more sensitive and respectful manner which includes releasing any future report findings to the families and their legal counsel independently with empathy and compassion before the findings are made public.”

Beulah Wabasse, Jordan's grandmother offered the following statement:

"Jordan's family will never give up in our search for justice for Jordan Wabasse. The Jordan Wabasse family believes there is enough evidence in the case to strongly suspect foul play despite negligent preliminary results indicating the cause of death as drowning which were released prior to a proper death investigation. We hope that the Thunder Bay Police Service reinvestigation will be transparent and not simply a cover up. Our family will always carry grief in our hearts like all the other families involved and we too also believe that justice has to be served for our son, grandson, brother, nephew and cousin Jordan Wabasse.

— 30 —

For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Manager – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca

