

PRESS ADVISORY

STAFF SERGEANT SWAWN HARRISON OF THE THUNDER BAY POLICE SERVICE DEMOTED IN RELATION TO DISCRIMINATORY POLICE INVESTIGATION

February 3, 2023

Today, the sentencing decision of Superintendent (Ret.) Greg Walton was released in respect of the findings of guilt against Staff Sergeant Shawn Harrison of the Thunder Bay Police Service for discreditable conduct and neglect of duty due to a discriminatory police death investigation that he conducted into the death of Stacey DeBungee. This decision, made under the *Police Services Act*, ordered that Staff Sergeant Harrison be demoted in rank from staff sergeant to sergeant for a term of eighteen (18) months. At the conclusion of that period, he is to be returned to the rank of staff sergeant, provided his disciplinary record remains unblemished. The decision further ordered that within three months of the release of the decision, Staff Sergeant Harrison must attend Indigenous Cultural Competency Training.

The DeBungee family was hopeful that a serious message would be sent to Staff Sergeant Harrison and other Thunder Bay Police Service members that this type of discriminatory investigation would not be tolerated, and that Staff Sergeant Harrison would be terminated from his employment. The DeBungee family feel this was a missed opportunity to address the larger issues between Indigenous people in Thunder Bay and the Thunder Bay Police Service, and to deter similar behaviour in the future.

Jim Leonard, one of the Public Complainants in this matter, commented, **“This case is emblematic of the larger issue between the Thunder Bay Police Service and Indigenous people in Thunder Bay. There is still significant work that needs to be done to repair that relationship. If the Thunder Bay Police Service is serious about repairing this relationship, they will make attempts and efforts to ensure that something like this never happens again, and that officers are truly held accountable for this type of misconduct.”**

Lawyer Asha James, who acts for the Public Complainants, stated, **“there is no doubt that Staff Sergeant Harrison’s failure to conduct an adequate investigation free of discrimination has left the DeBungee family in a position where they do not know, and likely will never know, what happened to Stacey DeBungee. The family deserved better, and we can only hope that this case will serve as a warning to other Thunder Bay Police officers that the way they have conducted business in respect of investigations of deaths of Indigenous people will not be tolerated.**

The disposition decision, as well as the Broken Trust Report will be posted on our website.

For further information, please see our website at www.falconers.ca