

Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

www.scoinc.mb.ca Facebook: @SCOIncMB

SCO RESPONDS TO PETITION TO PROTECT POLICE Calls to Shield Officers from Hate Speech Miss the Mark – Grand Chief

April 15, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is gravely disappointed by calls to recognize police officers as a group that requires federal protection from hate speech.

“When I heard about this petition, I had to make sure it was actually true,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “To equate the lived experience of police forces with First Nations and other racialized peoples is dumbfounding at best. It’s one thing to have a former member of the Winnipeg Police Service lead this misinformed and tone-deaf initiative, but to have a member of parliament take a lead role is extremely disheartening.”

SCO is responding to a published article in the Winnipeg Free Press in which retired Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) Inspector Stan Tataryn states that it's time Canada recognize officers as a group that needs protection, particularly when it comes to protests against police after violent incidents. Winnipeg Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) Kevin Lamoureux has sponsored the petition started by Tataryn, which asks Ottawa to broaden hate-speech laws to include vocations, in particular police officers.

As part of the rationale for the petition, it is argued that protests against the police by First Nations and community groups would actually lead to an increase in the chance of racially charged shootings, with officers doubting they have proper authority, and then relying more on their weapon or use of force.

“The idea that police cannot do their job effectively while experiencing critiques and protests from the community is outrageous. Many communities, first and foremost First Nation communities, have legitimate concerns regarding the number of racialized shootings and other encounters with police happening across this country, as well as the broader systemic racism that still exists in our criminal justice system. Hate speech laws were never designed to protect institutions that exist to serve the public or to help public servants do their job properly. This dangerous narrative really points to the need to greatly improve training that police are receiving in this area.”

This initiative, spearheaded by former Inspector Tataryn and MP Lamoureux, comes on the heels of vigils held last week to honour the one-year anniversary of the tragic police shooting of Eishia Hudson, a 16-year-old First Nation girl who was fatally shot by a Winnipeg police officer. The officer that shot

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Eishia Hudson was cleared of any wrongdoing by the Independent Investigation Unit, which led to protests across Canada with people demanding an end to police brutality and racialized shootings.

Throughout the past year, police across Canada have been under scrutiny for their treatment of First Nation communities and peoples. According to recent analysis, since 2017 an Indigenous person in Canada is more than 10 times more likely to be shot and killed by a police officer than a non-racialized Canadian.

SCO is emphatic that institutions such as the WPS, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and other law enforcement need to be held to account and that people need the freedom to assemble and speak out when they see injustice.

According to the report, Lamoureux's petition appeared on the House of Commons website on April 9, and already has 166 signatures. It will be presented to the Commons if it gets 500 endorsements by June 8.

"If this misguided petition is supported, I will be expressing my feelings and disappointment to the Prime Minister if I have to," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "If Mr. Tataryn and Mr. Lamoureux want to lower the temperature between protestors and police, then they need to start by working with First Nations and other racialized peoples to create systemic change within the ranks of the forces they want to protect."

SCO recently launched a survey where all First Nation people in Manitoba can report on experiences of racism when dealing with police services across the province. The survey results will soon be released to the public and will help to inform how we can create better systems and policies to reduce racism and better serve southern First Nations.

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

For Media Inquiries:

Vic Savino, Communications Officer, Southern Chiefs' Organization

(204) 881-4512 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca