



Thunder Bay Police Service

SYLVIE HAUTH, CHIEF OF POLICE
1200 Balmoral Street, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5Z5
Tel: (807) 684-1304 • Fax: (807) 623-9242

September 24, 2020

Chair Georjann Morrisseau
Thunder Bay Police Services Board
317 E. Victoria Avenue
Thunder Bay, ON P7C 1A4
c/o John Hannam

Via E-mail

Ruth Goba
Executive Director
Black Legal Action Centre

Via E-mail

Christa Big Canoe
Legal Advocacy Director
Aboriginal Legal Services

Via E-mail

Abby Dushman
Director, Criminal Justice Program
Canadian Civil Liberties Association

Via E-mail

Ryan Peck
Executive Director
HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario

Via E-mail

Re: Covid Portal – Thunder Bay Police Service

Further to the verbal update provided at the Thunder Bay Police Services Board meeting on September 15th, 2020, I am writing on behalf of the Chief of Police to provide further details and context to the use of the COVID portal.

Fifty-two (52) employees within the Communications Centre at the Thunder Bay Police Service had access to the COVID portal. These individuals were call-takers, dispatchers, supervisors and managers of the Communications Centre. The COVID portal was accessed by these employees for work purposes only and all of those who had access to the portal were properly trained prior to utilizing the portal and were well versed on the policy and guidelines in place.

Communications Centre employees were tasked with checking the COVID portal whenever a call for service came in. Employees would check the portal for all names of the individuals the officer would be in contact with at any given incident and the address listed in the call for service. In some cases it was necessary to conduct multiple checks on one name or address given the way the information was stored in the portal. The Ministry did not warrant that the information available through the portal was complete, accurate or up-to-date and further indicated that there may be inconsistencies in the way address information was found within the portal. To that end it was

sometimes necessary to run multiple searches for one address to ensure the results, if any, were found. These above reasons explain why the Thunder Bay Police Service had a high number of “hits” in the COVID portal database. Between April 7, 2020 and July 9, 2020 (the day on which the Chief of Police discontinued the use of the COVID portal within the Service), there were 11,274 calls for service to the police along with 1,109 calls for service for fire, for a total of 12,383 calls in which the portal was checked. The additional checks, amounting to the 14,831 hits on the COVID portal were a result of multiple searches on the same incident to ensure the most accurate information possible and daily searches to update our Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) System.

As stated at the Police Services Board meeting on September 15th, 2020, there was a shortage in personal protection equipment (PPE) in the beginning months of the pandemic. The COVID portal allowed our officers to ration the use of their PPE by knowing when it was necessary to take all precautions (i.e. when interacting with a positive COVID individual).

Upon the discontinuation of the COVID portal on July 9th, 2020 all information retrieved from the portal was permanently erased. The information was never stored in the Thunder Bay Police Service’s internal records systems. Our CAD System was updated on a daily basis when positive COVID results were found. This information was set to expire on the day the emergency was declared over, however since the Chief of Police discontinued the portal use early, all data was deleted on July 9th, 2020.

The Thunder Bay Police Service no longer has access to the data and therefore any audit would be futile. Further, the Ministry did conduct three (3) audits of the COVID portal use in the months of May, June and July. The Thunder Bay Police Service followed up on all audits and both the Ministry and the Service are satisfied that all searches of the COVID portal were both authorized and appropriate.

While the Service can understand the concerns of the various organizations who wrote to the Board, the COVID portal was Ministry authorized and the Service had lawful authority to use it to protect the First Responders who worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic, regardless of the personal risk. Further, the COVID portal assisted the community of Thunder Bay by reducing the spread of the virus.

I trust the above answers the Board’s questions and concerns regarding the use of the COVID portal. Should you wish to discuss further please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Sincerely,



Holly Walbourne,
Legal Counsel