

Tribunals Ontario

Ontario Civilian Police Commission

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La Commission civile de l'Ontario sur la police

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(Disponible en Français)

July 5, 2024

Councillor Susan Stevenson
Member of the London Police Services Board
601 Dundas Street
London, ON N6B 1X1Via Email: sstevenson@london.ca

Dear Member Stevenson,

Re: Outcome of Preliminary Review into complaints against you in your role as Member of the London Police Services Board

I am writing to you with respect to the Preliminary Review commenced by the Ontario Civilian Police Commission (“Commission”) in response to complaints received in 2023 and 2024 against you in your role as a member of the London Police Services Board (“Board”).

The Commission thoroughly reviews complaints or information it receives prior to making any decision of whether to proceed further, to an investigation or otherwise. During this process, the Commission makes enquiries and gathers information to inform its decision-making process. Where appropriate, one outcome can be a public admonition letter. As no early resolution was reached in this matter, this letter is being issued as the outcome of the Preliminary Review of your conduct and will be posted to the Commission’s website.

The evidence gathered in the Preliminary Review through a review of a sampling of your social media posts in 2023-2024, as well as the responses you provided to the allegations made in the complaints, supports our view that your conduct falls short of the standard of conduct expected of members of police services boards, as set out in Regulation 421/97 – Member of Police Services Boards – Code of Conduct (“Members’ Code of Conduct”) of the *Police Services Act* (“PSA”, repealed). Of particular concern are your posts to social media that:

- Refer to individuals with addiction issues as “junkies”;
- Post pictures of individual unhoused persons in London without their permission;
- Suggest specific individuals have committed crimes, such as that a homeless individual pushing a cart would have stolen the cart; and
- Generally reinforce negative stereotypes of people with addictions as violent, engaging in criminal activity, and personally choosing to be unhoused and addicted.

It should be noted that because of the extent of your social media posts, a review of the entirety of your accounts was not conducted. The volume of posts suggests that care and restraint were not exercised by you prior to posting to social media. The issues identified above should not be considered exhaustive with respect to potential concerns with your posts.

Your response to the complaints was sought twice during the Preliminary Review as complaints were ongoing. You maintained in both responses that your view on homelessness is a political position held as a City Councillor, independent of your position on the London Services Board.

This Commission has previously stated that a police services board is not an elected body, and the role has an institutional focus, not a political one. Even though an individual may be elected to municipal Council, once they accept appointment to a police services board, they accept the responsibilities imposed under the applicable Code of Conduct. They must ensure the public's respect for and confidence in the Police Service is maintained to the highest level possible, and balance their potentially competing roles. See *In the Matter of an Inquiry under s. 25(1) of the Act Into the Conduct and Performance of Duties of Greg Oliver, A Member of the Stirling-Rawdon Police Services Board*, (October 7, 2014, OCPC).

With respect to concerns regarding the use of the term "junkies" in your social media accounts, you deny that it constituted a breach of the Code of Conduct, noting that you did not use the term itself, but retweeted an article that did. You maintained that the reference in the article was secondary to the important information it contained. The Commission does not agree with your response.

Use of denigrating language does not respect the dignity of individuals and discredits the integrity of the board, irrespective of whether it is used directly by a member or whether a member quotes it wholesale.

Regarding concerns about posting pictures of unhoused individuals without their permission, rather than confirming consent was provided from those individuals for use of their photographs on the internet, you asserted there was no evidence you posted those photographs *without* permission. You further stated you have never received a request from any of the individuals in the photos to not post the photos or to remove the photos, and you would have done so immediately if any had made such a request.

This approach to the privacy and dignity of individuals living in London is troubling and does not inspire public confidence in your abilities and integrity as a member of the London Police Services Board. Consent is not assumed unless an objection is expressed in this kind of context.

You assert that contrary to allegations, your post of a photograph of an unhoused individual with a shopping cart does not suggest he engaged in criminal activity. The post asks where the help is for the unhoused individual, "the business that 'supplies' the shopping carts," and the "previous owner" of the shopping cart contents." You suggest in your response that you intended to refer to help for businesses and people who are donating carts and other belongings to unhoused individuals.

The Commission does not agree with your response. The clear implication of your post, especially the use of quotes, is that there is a business whose cart has been stolen, and there is

a rightful owner of the contents of the cart, who is not the unhoused individual. Regardless of intent, a member of a police services board has a duty to inspire public confidence in that police services board. That does not include relying on ambiguities to excuse posts that could directly touch on policing, especially after concerns have been raised to you. Both the original post and your response to concerns about it raise issues regarding your ability to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct.

In this case, the Commission decided it is not in the public interest to initiate a formal investigation at this time. However, you are cautioned that the Code of Conduct requires a higher standard for members of a police services board, and that social media posts can bring your compliance with the Code of Conduct into question. You are reminded that as a member of the Board, you swore an oath to fulfill your responsibilities to uphold the standards of conduct as a member of a police services board.

On April 1, 2024, the *Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019* came into force and the *Police Services Act* was repealed. As a result, the Commission cannot accept any new appeals, applications, or requests for investigation. Should your conduct continue, individuals may file a complaint with the [Inspectorate of Policing](https://www.iop.com) online or contact that office for more information by email at IOPComplaints@ontario.ca or by phone at 416-314-4130 or 1-888-333-5078.

You are encouraged to reflect on your conduct and seek to do better in your role as a public leader in police services for the City of London. Continuing this conduct risks future investigations by and complaints to the Inspectorate of Policing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Weir". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sean Weir, KC
Executive Chair, Tribunals Ontario
Chair, Ontario Civilian Police Commission