

* This is a corrected version of the report posted prior to the January Board meeting to correct the date that the Uniform Policy reminder was sent to January 13.



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

REPORT TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE BOARD

REPORT DATE: January 2, 2022
COMMITTEE MEETING DATE: January 19, 2022
BOARD REPORT # 2301C09

Regular

TO: **Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee**
FROM: Deputy Chief Fiona Wilson
SUBJECT: Service or Policy Complaint #2022-21155 Thin Blue Line Patch

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Vancouver Police Board (VPB) Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee (Committee) concludes its review of the complaint based on information outlined in this report.

SUMMARY:

On December 1, 2021, the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC) received a complaint with concerns regarding a VPD member wearing, what the complainant perceived to be an offensive patch (Canadian flag with blue line through it), at a land back rally. There were few additional details in the complaint. It is believed, based on the description of the patch that the complainant is referring to what is commonly known as the 'Thin Blue Line' patch.

The OPCC forwarded a Service or Policy Complaint to the Vancouver Police Board in relation to the complainant's submission. The OPCC did not initiate a public trust investigation into the conduct of the individual police officer.

This review did not examine the actions of the individual officer and focused on VPD policy in relation to the wearing of patches, specifically, the Thin Blue Line patch, on the police uniform. Included with this report, for context, is a briefing report regarding the Thin Blue Line and the more recent evolution of the Thin Blue Line patch.

This review determined that there is a specific VPD Policy related to uniform and dress that includes a description of the approved order of dress for all VPD police uniforms. Current policy states that no unauthorized modifications to member's issued uniforms or accessories are permitted unless otherwise authorized. The Thin Blue Line patch is not an authorized uniform item.

BACKGROUND:

The VPD entrusts its members (i.e. police officers, Community Safety Personnel, Jail Guards, Traffic Authority, and Special Constables) with the responsibility for maintaining a high standard

of dress and deportment. As per Regulation and Procedure Manual (RPM) Policy 5.4 Uniform and Dress (Attachment 'A'), "Dress and Department Uniformity is desirable and conformity to Department standards is required. The BC Police Act (Uniforms) Regulations provides the uniform standard adhered to by the Department."

The policy sets out the standards and expectations for the standard dress uniform, the formal dress uniform, the officer's mess kit, the standard operational duty uniform and the standard officer's uniform. The entirety of each uniform is covered in the policy including the use and placement of name tags, undressed ribbons and shoulder flashes. The wearing of medals and commendations are also addressed for each respective uniform.

The acceptable use of specific commemorative pins are also established. The only commemorative items authorized in the RPM are the VPD PRIDE pin (this is optional for members to wear during PRIDE week) and, in the event of an officer's passing, the Peace Officers' Memorial Ribbon (may be worn from the day of death up to and including the day of the funeral). The Memorial Ribbon is also permitted to be worn in recognition of Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day, which is celebrated the last Sunday of September. The Memorial Ribbon can be worn from the preceding Monday until and including that day.

Throughout the policy, there are helpful photos to assist members to determine what is authorized on their respective uniforms and where to place various items.

According to section 5.4.4 (7) of the policy, "Members shall not make any modification to their issue uniform or accessories unless otherwise authorized".

Section 5.5.4 (4) of the RPM, which establishes standards for External Body Armour Carriers (EBAC), states that "members shall affix a VPD-issued "Vancouver Police" identifier tag and identification tag (with PIN or surname and first initial) to the EBAC; no other patches, tags or placards may be affixed to the EBAC without approval of the Uniform Committee." (Attachment 'B')

DISCUSSION:

On May 13, 2022, the Vancouver Police Board contacted the complainant and stated that the Service or Policy Complaints Review Committee had reviewed the complaint at its meeting on April 21, 2022 and moved to process the complaint pursuant to Section 171(1)(e) of the *Police Act* [to take any other course of action the board considers necessary to respond adequately to the complaint] namely to:

1. Request an information report from the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) with a history of the badge and symbol as it applies to the VPD and policing in general, incorporating feedback from consultations with the VPD's Indigenous and African Descent Advisory Committees;
2. Concurrently bringing the matter forward to the BC Association of Police Boards (BCAPB) for all municipal police boards to discuss potential next steps, as the matter should not be dealt with through one municipality alone; and,
3. To make the report from the VPD public and use it to form the discussions with the BCAPB.

A briefing report entitled "Thin Blue Line" (Attachment 'C') has been completed that details the history of the Thin Blue Line, the significance of the symbol to police and recent controversies regarding the emblem.

In October 2022, both the VPD Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) and the African Descent VPD Advisory Committee (ADAC) were presented with a draft copy of the report along with a verbal update and were asked to provide feedback. The verbal responses from the IAC have been incorporated into the report while additional comments from the ADAC are pending.

CONCLUSION:

The VPD acknowledges the concerns raised by the complainant. The use of any unauthorized patches by VPD members on their uniform is prohibited as per VPD policy. On January 13, 2023, the VPD sent out a reminder to all members about the Uniform Policy to ensure their continued awareness of the importance of adhering to said policy.

Author: Deputy Chief Fiona Wilson

Date: January 2, 2022

Submitting Executive Member:

Fiona Wilson

Date: January 4, 2022