

REPORT DATE: March 16, 2022
BOARD MEETING DATE: March 30, 2022
BOARD REPORT # 2022-C015

TO: **Surrey Police Board**

FROM: **Deputy Chief Constable Hyland** FILE: **60550-20-03**

SUBJECT: **Service or Policy Complaint OPCC File 22-21233 – Uniform Insignias – Thin Blue Line Patch**

RECOMMENDATION

The Deputy Chief Constable recommends that the Surrey Police Board (the "Board"):

- A. Receive this report for information;
- B. Conclude its review of the complaint based on the information outlined in this report;
- C. Submit the findings to the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, and;
- D. Make this report available to the public, once approved.

This report is being presented to the Surrey Police Board in a closed agenda under Section (69)(2) (d) of the *BC Police Act*.

This report is approved by Chief Lipinski.



SUMMARY:

On February 4, 2021, the Board received an anonymous complaint via email by a person identifying themselves as a "Surrey Resident" outlining their disagreement with a photo that was posted online depicting a Surrey Police Service (SPS) member in uniform with a 'Thin Blue Line' patch on the front of their uniform. The complainant believed that police officers should not be wearing a symbol they attributed to white supremacy and that the patch also encompassed political and provocative consequences.

At the time in which the member was captured wearing the patch in question, there was no SPS policy in place specifically directing the use of insignias or symbols while in uniform.

On March 3, 2022, the Board approved the '*Uniforms, Insignia and Dress Standards*' policy to provide SPS members direction on the appropriate uniform dress, standard and method of displaying medals and insignia. This policy, currently in place, provides direction to all members that while they are on duty, members must only wear issued uniform and equipment unless otherwise authorized by the Chief Constable or designate. The 'Thin Blue Line' patch is not an issued or authorized insignia of the SPS uniform. As such, it is recommended that the Surrey Police Board conclude its review of the complaint based on the information outlined in this report and submit the findings to the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner.

BACKGROUND:

On February 4, 2022, the complainant sent an email to the Board regarding an image posted on social media that depicted a SPS member in uniform wearing a 'Thin Blue Line' patch on the outside of his external body armour carrier. The complainant made several statements that included their belief that SPS had a duty to appear non-partisan while serving the public. In addition, the complainant believed that this patch was an overt political and provocative symbol. The complainant added that this patch had been adopted and used by white supremacist groups and also as a statement of opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement. The complainant stated that the RCMP and other police agencies across Canada have prohibited the use of this patch while in uniform and is asking the Board whether the SPS will implement a policy banning the use of the patch. In the email, the complainant supplied two photos of two SPS members in uniform with one of the members wearing the 'Thin Blue Line' patch.

On February 7, 2022, Ms. Melissa Granum, Executive Director of the Board, advised the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner of the above-mentioned Service or Policy complaint.

DISCUSSION:Applicable SPS Policy in place for use of insignias and symbols on uniforms

Current SPS Policy AD 4.3 "*Uniforms, Insignia, & Dress Standards*" is in place for members regarding the use of insignias and symbols on their uniforms. The sections which address the complainant's concerns are the following:

- a. Section 3.2: While on duty, Members must only wear issued uniform and equipment unless otherwise authorized by the Chief Constable or designate; and
- b. Section 4.30: Members must wear only issued symbols, pins, patches, insignias on the uniform. Any symbols, pins, patches or insignias worn on the SPS uniform which have not been issued must be approved by the UEC [Uniform and Equipment Committee] and the Chief Constable or designate.

As per SPS Policy AD 4.3, that was approved on March 3, 2022, any member wearing a patch or insignia as outlined in this complaint, would now be considered in violation of this new SPS policy. With respect to the member captured in the photograph, as the member was wearing an insignia without applicable policy in place at that time, there is no infraction or contravention of SPS policy.

CONCLUSION:

The current SPS Policy AD 4.3 specifically addresses the issue of the wearing of the 'Thin Blue Line' patch or other unauthorized insignias by SPS member in uniform. Such a patch would not be authorized for use by SPS members or other potentially sensitive symbols on their uniforms.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Board conclude its review of the complaint based on the information outlined in this report and submit the findings to the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner.



Jennifer Hyland
Deputy Chief Constable