



# WOLASTOQEY NATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Matawaskiye • Neqotkuk • Wotstak • Pilick • Sitansisk • Welamukotuk

[DELIVERED VIA EMAIL]

*Ref: WNNB [110-21]*

November 24, 2021

**Dr. Manju Varma**

Commissioner on Systemic Racism  
Beaverbrook Building  
P. O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5H1

Dear Dr. Varma:

Please accept this letter as formal notice that for the reasons outlined herein, we have decided not to participate in the proceedings of this commission and as such, are unable to accept your request to meet in connection with your work as Commissioner on systemic racism for New Brunswick.

Our decision comes after careful consideration of the context in which you ask us, as leaders of the Wolastoqey Nation, to meet.

That context begins with the shooting deaths of two Indigenous people at the hands of police in New Brunswick and our heartfelt pleas for an Indigenous-led independent inquiry into systemic racism.

In the 17 months that followed, this province saw massive public outcry in favour of our request – and not the ill-equipped and ineffective alternative unilaterally mandated by the provincial government.

We believe you were set up to fail from the outset by a disingenuous, disrespectful provincial government that afforded you a team of three people and one year to conduct “a comprehensive review about the extent and scope of systemic racism in New Brunswick, including the government’s role in eliminating systemic racism both within provincial institutions and agencies and in the province generally.”

We were immediately worried the commission would be used by the Higgs government to sweep deep-rooted, fundamental examples of racism under the table – not seek the justice our people deserve. Nothing we’ve seen to date from the Higgs government has alleviated these concerns.

This commission has no power to compel evidence or testimony from anyone, much less police and government sources. How can we be assured those institutions – where we know systemic racism is most pervasive – will participate transparently?



Further, while we support action against any form of racism in New Brunswick, the systemic racism faced by Indigenous people is unique as is the relationship Indigenous people have with the Province. The experiences and subsequent recommendations need to be addressed in an equally singular and unique way. As we hope you understand, a board study that lumps all racialized groups together – like your mandate requires – is itself an example of systemic racism.

Regrettably, none of the three people involved in the commission are Indigenous. Regardless of the qualifications and intentions of you and your colleagues, this is a critical oversight.

We also find it increasingly difficult to see your role as truly independent of the government that created the commission. How else can we explain not being asked for input on the terms of reference, as was expected in the first 50 days of your mandate? How else can we explain your silence on the provincial government’s gagging of civil servants from making land acknowledgements? How else can we explain your inability to compel evidence or witnesses, particularly from the government and police structures with the most to address on the topic of systemic racism?

We fear our participation in this unacceptable alternative to an inquiry would be misconstrued by the provincial government as approval of the commission. As you know, we made a very specific proposal for an inquiry into systemic racism in New Brunswick. Unfortunately, nothing we have seen from your efforts so far has changed our mind about the necessity of that request.

Respectfully,

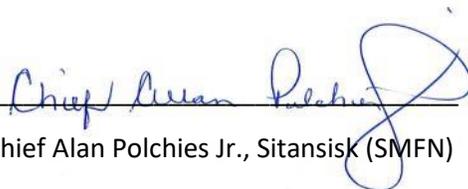
Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick Chiefs



Chief Ross Perley, Neqotkuk (TFN)



Chief Shelley Sabattis, Welamukotuk (OFN)



Chief Alan Polchies Jr., Sitansisk (SMFN)



Chief Gabriel Atwin, Pilick (KFN)



Chief Patricia Bernard, Matawaskiye (MMFN)



Chief Tim Paul, Wotstak (WFN)



cc: Shyla O'Donnell, Consultation Director, WNNB  
Megan Fullarton, Director of Programs, WTCI  
Gillian Paul, Legal and Governance Advisor, WNNB

Junior Kalala, Executive Assistant for the Commission  
Robert Tay-Burroughs, Senior Policy Advisor to the Commissioner

