



## **SASKATOON POLICE SERVICE**

**TO:** Jo Custead, Chairperson  
Board of Police Commissioners

**FROM:** Troy Cooper  
Office of the Chief

**DATE:** 2022 May 09

**SUBJECT:** Use of Symbols on Police Uniforms

**FILE #:** 5,014

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### **ISSUE:**

At its January 13, 2022 public meeting, the Board of Police Commissioners requested SPS Administration report on the use of symbols in addition to supplied uniforms, and in particular, the Service's response to the use of Thin Blue Line patches in Saskatoon. This report is in response to the Board's motion.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That this report be received as information.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

This report focuses on the strategic theme of communication and our goal of utilizing communication to maintain transparency and public trust.

### **BACKGROUND:**

*The Police Act, 1990*, and *The Municipal Police Clothing and Rank Regulations, 1991*<sup>1</sup> sets the standard for all authorized clothing or uniform items worn by all municipal police officers in the Province of Saskatchewan.

Sections 4 through 14 outline the uniform and accessory items authorized by the *Regulations*. In addition, Section 14.1 of the *Regulations* authorizes a chief to permit a member to wear a symbol

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from [www.qp.gov.sk.ca](http://www.qp.gov.sk.ca)

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of the member's heritage on his or her dress uniform, as well as to permit the wearing of the flag of Saskatchewan or flag of Canada.

Finally, Section 14.1 of the *Regulations* also authorizes the Saskatchewan Police Commission is to approve alternate items of uniform or waive the requirement to wear a particular item of uniform for an individual member or commissioned officer.

Guidelines for the wearing of other symbols like the lapel poppy worn during the Remembrance period of the last Friday in October until November 11, the Police Memorial Ribbon, and Special Teams insignias is covered in local policy<sup>2</sup>, if not specifically referenced in the *Regulations*.

What isn't reflected in policy or in the *Regulations* is the wearing of other symbols such as Bell's Let's Talk, Pride, Orange shirts, Pink shirts, etc. although the wearing of these symbols has not typically drawn any negative reaction from most people.

In regards to the Thin Blue Line patches, neither the Chief of Police nor the Saskatchewan Police Commission has authorized the wearing of this symbol, although the Commission has such authority.

### **DISCUSSION:**

A quick Google search about the “Thin Blue Line” will yield countless links to articles about the origins of the symbol, and groups either in support or opposed to the symbol, freely express their opinions in some of these articles.

The origins of such can be traced back to the late 1800's and the Crimean War when the British Infantry held the “thin red line” and held off the Russian Infantry. This was later captured in poetry, writings, and art.

In the 1950's, the blue line was adopted by law enforcement to represent their courage and sacrifice while protecting the American people. The Thin Blue Line flag itself was created in 2014 by US college student, Andrew Jacob, and brought to market.

The Thin Blue Line is similar to the Thin Red Line for firefighters, Thin White Line for Emergency Medical personnel, and Thin Green Line for Military personnel. The intent for most of these groups is a symbol to represent their courage and sacrifice while performing their daily jobs.

Since the mid 1990's, this symbol has been used in the Canadian policing context as a symbol of an honourable profession devoted to protecting the public. In 1994, the modern-day Police Memorial Ribbon includes a black and blue ribbon, and is the national symbol of mourning for Police and Peace Officers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from Saskatoon Police Service policy Part II, Chapter C

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from [memorialribbon.org](http://memorialribbon.org)



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Controversy over the meaning of the symbol began in 2015 in the UK, in response to cutbacks to police budgets. In 2020, after the murder of George Floyd in the US, Black Lives Matter and Defund movements created calls for police reform. Unfortunately, this led to counter movements such as Blue Lives Matter, which although it may have been created as a response to the murder of police officers in New York, it highlights a sometimes polarizing relationship between the police and the communities we serve.

In recent years, extremist groups have co-opted symbols for use in their protests/movements such as the Canadian flag turned upside down, Pride flag, Indigenous flags, Every Child Matters, the Thin Blue Line, and other symbols. The high-jacking of these symbols for use other than their intended purpose is offensive to every citizen who knows their true meaning.

Police officers in Canada who believe the symbol shows support for other officers including those suffering from PTSD, would be saddened to learn other groups have misappropriated the Thin Blue Line flag, that it can represent a society that is quite dystopian, and that for some people, it can be divisive between the police and the communities we serve.

Our own consultations with a number of our advisory groups range from those who support its use, those who feel another symbol should be considered in its place, and those who feel it is a symbol that can be associated with bigotry, racism and hate.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Only symbols expressly permitted by Saskatoon Police Policy or the regulations of *The Municipal Police Clothing and Rank Regulations, 1991* are authorized to be on the uniform of the Saskatoon Police Service. Exceptions to the wearing of these symbols are granted from time to time for special ceremonies or nationally recognized days. The Thin Blue Line patch is not one of those symbols permitted to be on the uniform.

**Written and  
approved by:**

**Mitch Yuzdepski  
Deputy Chief, Support Services**



**Submitted by:**

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**Troy Cooper  
Chief of Police**

**Dated:**

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**May 9, 2022**