



September 28, 2020

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Dear Mr. Judson,

Thank you for your letter on the issue of renaming municipal roads and the potential implications under Ontario's *Human Rights Code* (*Code*). The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) does not currently have a formal policy position to offer on this specific issue.

The OHRC's approach in its previous work may provide foundational principles and guidance on this important issue. As you noted, in December 2018, the OHRC reached a [settlement](#) in the case of *Gallant v Mississauga* after intervening on this matter before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. The settlement addressed the harmful impact of stereotypes on Indigenous youth by requiring Mississauga to remove from its sports facilities all Indigenous-themed mascots, symbols, names and imagery related to non-Indigenous sports organizations.

In its May 2019 [letter](#) to municipalities promoting the settlement, the OHRC recognized that some words and images may negatively impact the ability of *Code*-protected individuals and groups to participate and benefit equally in their community. Human rights law has found that images and words that degrade people because of their ancestry, race, colour and ethnic origin, among other grounds may in some instances amount to a denial of service and violate the *Code*. In specific circumstances it may be necessary to revisit long-standing norms in our society. We highlighted the importance of engaging with individuals and communities to promote understanding when concerns are raised. We urged municipalities to take the first step in removing barriers by collaborating with affected communities to develop policies on the use of names and images to promote welcoming and inclusive environments for all groups in society.

One of the purposes of the *Code* is the "creation of a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community and able to contribute fully to the development and well-being of the

community.” We encourage the Town of Fort Frances and all municipalities to help fulfill this purpose and avoid situations that may lead to discrimination.

Thank you for writing to the OHRC about this matter. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and welcome any additional information that you may wish to share.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ena Chadha', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ena Chadha, LL.B., LL.M.  
Chief Commissioner