

Police complaint director thrust into limelight



Brett Gundlock/National Post

Gerry McNeilly, Independent Police Review Director for the OIPRD (Office of the Independent Police Review Director,) poses for a photo Friday, July 23, 2010. The OIPRD is launching an investigation into Police action at the G20 Summit last June, 2010, in Toronto.

[Kenyon Wallace](#) July 24, 2010 – 10:27 am

Gerry McNeilly is about to become a household name, a prospect the lawyer and former deputy judge seems ready to embrace.

As the province's newly minted Independent Police Review Director, Mr. McNeilly is tasked with handling all public complaints against police in Ontario — a job that in the

nine months of his office's existence has kept him busily squirrelled away at his Bay Street office.

But with the announcement this week that he is launching a "systemic review" of 300 complaints about police conduct during the G20 summit — the agency's largest and most high-profile investigation to date — Mr. McNeilly is aware that his every move is suddenly under scrutiny from a public that only a few days ago scarcely knew he existed.

"I know it's high profile and there's a great amount of interest, but I'm going to carry out my job in a transparent and accountable manner to ensure that there is trust and confidence in this public complaints system," he said in an interview. "While I'm mindful of the politics and the high-profile nature of this, that will not guide me."

Mr. McNeilly may find the political nature of any large-scale inquiry into public organizations hard to avoid. Already some are questioning why it took his office nearly a month after the G20 to announce it would launch an investigation.

But Mr. McNeilly shrugs off such criticism, saying he wanted to wait to see whether there were any complaint patterns that would allow him to conduct a systemic review, in addition to examining individual concerns.

"I don't think I waited a long time," he said. "I wanted to make an informed decision ... and not be too quick out of the blocks and not recognize the types of complaints coming in. Now I see a pattern. I couldn't see that in the first week [after the summit]."

The Office of the Independent Police Review Director is an arm's-length civilian agency of the Ministry of the Attorney-General that has handled 2,400 complaints since its October launch. Before then, police departments handled complaints internally.

The Director has the power under the Public Inquiries Act to conduct searches and seizures, order police to investigate and subpoena documents and witnesses, including chiefs of police.

He can recommend, but not order disciplinary action against officers or that police procedure be changed. Every complaint is reviewed to ensure it is not frivolous and that it is filed within the six-month limit.

"If I say the complaint is not valid, that ends the matter. There are no appeals," Mr. McNeilly said.

In his new role, the father in his 50s of two adult daughters will draw upon experience gleaned over a long legal career in which he served as an Ontario deputy judge before becoming the executive director of Legal Aid Manitoba for the past nine years. Prior to that, Mr. McNeilly also served four years as the chairman of the board of inquiry for the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.

His review of police conduct during the G20 will be viewed by many legal observers as the first litmus test of the efficacy of the Independent Police Review Act.

“This is a test of the government’s commitment to put their money where their mouth is, and a test of the mettle of the man in charge,” said human rights lawyer Julian Falconer. “In the coming months we’re going to find out a lot about how robust this legislation is and whether this unit has been properly resourced.”

kewallace@nationalpost.com

Posted in: [G20](#), [Posted Toronto](#) Tags: [G20 Probe](#)

MORE FROM KENYON WALLACE

