Nfld. & Labrador

Innu woman’s family says her hair was forcibly cut while in police custody

RCMP says three officers are suspended, under investigation by SIRT-NL

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Antonia Benuen says she learned her daughter's hair had been cut when she visited her daughter at the RCMP lock-up in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. But she does not know when the incident happened. (Regan Burden/CBC)

The mother of a 32-year-old Innu woman says RCMP officers cut her daughter's hair against her will while in police custody.

The RCMP confirmed in an emailed statement that three officers have been suspended following "an incident involving a member of an Innu First Nations community while they were in police custody in Happy Valley-Goose Bay detachment."

“My daughter’s hair is gone,” Antonia Benuen told CBC News.

Antonia Benuen said her daughter, Adeline, was arrested outside the Labrador Inn in Happy Valley-Goose Bay on April 22, 2026. The inn is used as a shelter for the unhoused and people who do not have a permanent place to live.

According to court documents, Adeline Benuen was charged on that same day with two counts of failure to comply with orders.

Mother learned her daughter’s hair during visit

Antonia Benuen said she learned her daughter's hair had been cut when she visited her daughter at the RCMP lock-up in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. But she does not know when the incident happened.

An article in the *The Telegram* cited unnamed sources who suggested police had cut Adeline Benuen's hair because she "made several attempts to take her own life" and "allegedly then attempted to use her own hair to harm herself."

Antonia Benuen rejects that assertion.

"She never suicidal, my baby daughter, Adeline,” she said.

The RCMP statement says the three officers are subject to an investigation by the Serious Incident Response Team of Newfoundland and Labrador (SIRT-NL), which investigates deaths, serious injuries, sexual offenses, and other significant incidents that stem from the actions of a police officer.

When contacted by CBC, a spokesperson for SIRT-NL confirmed the investigation, but said no further details will be provided until the investigation is complete.

CBC News asked the RCMP several more follow up questions, but a spokesperson did not answer any of them, directing questions to SIRT-NL.

Antonia Benuen said her daughter has been transferred to a facility in Newfoundland. When CBC asked the police about that, the RCMP would not answer that question either.

“With respect to any incarcerated persons in the province — their location and or movement between facilities — we recommend you direct your inquiry to either Crown Counsel of Newfoundland and Labrador or Corrections Institutional Services of Newfoundland and Labrador,” the email said.

Openness needed in investigation: lawyer

Will Hiscock is a lawyer who has represented two of the families of Innu youth whose deaths by suicides were investigated by the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System.

One died at the Labrador Correctional Centre and another youth died at the Labrador Group Home.

Hiscock said trust remains fragile between Indigenous communities and the police.

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"I truly hope that the Innu Nation and the community is involved in the investigation and becomes fully aware of the findings all the way through this. I think it's very important that there be a lot of openness in what went on here in order to maintain relationships with the community and not violate the trust," he said, noting he is not representing Adeline in this incident.

"I don't want to pre-judge [SIRT's] investigation, I'm very glad they are doing an investigation...there's obvious questions, this seems something that on its face should not have happened."

Antonia Benuen said she's worried about her daughter and wants to return home to Natuashish with her, as soon as they can.

Antonia Benuen has lost two other daughters, including Frederica Benuen, who froze to death outside the Labrador Inn in 2022. Antonia is also staying at the Labrador Inn, and said her house in Natuashish burned down.

Adeline is due back in court later this month.

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