



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 2

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EVIDENCE

Witness 6: Natasha Petite

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

Natasha, I'd like to begin by asking you to state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name for the record.

Natasha Petite

Sure, my name is Natasha Petite, N-A-T-A-S-H-A P-E-T-I-T-E.

Shawn Buckley

And do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Natasha Petite

Yes, I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, Natasha my understanding is that you have a disability, and you simply cannot wear a mask.

Natasha Petite

That is correct.

Shawn Buckley

Can you describe for us basically how that came about, because— I'll just back up. My understanding is you used to work in the oil patch in Alberta.

Natasha Petite

Yeah, I worked in the oil and gas industry in mainly Fort McMurray, Alberta, for ten years.

Shawn Buckley

And you worked in dangerous environments where you had to wear a mask.

Natasha Petite

Yeah, we had to wear, like—there's the half mask with a P100 filter respirator. And then there's the full face and sometimes we had to do full face and under Scott air-supplied breathing.

Shawn Buckley

Right. And the point I'm just trying to make is, it's not like you're mask averse or anything like that.

Natasha Petite

Exactly.

Shawn Buckley

You've professionally worn lots of masks. But something happened and now you truly have a disability and can't wear a mask.

Natasha Petite

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

Can you share with us how that came about?

Natasha Petite

In 2018, I was living in Quebec and I was in a car accident—it was January 24th, 2018—in which I'm actually lucky to be alive today. I was trapped in the car for about 45 minutes. I had the air knocked out of me. Some of my teeth were smashed and pretty much from that day, I have lost feeling in several different parts of my left leg. I have memory loss issues, herniated discs in my neck and my back, major depressive disorder, anxiety, and ADHD recently diagnosed.

Shawn Buckley

Sorry, you haven't gotten into it, and I don't need you to. But is it fair to say also, you were in a prolonged situation where it was difficult to breathe?

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

It was enclosed, there was smoke all about—and that is part of the reason why you just simply cannot wear a mask?

Natasha Petite

Yeah, actually, I do have PTSD from the car accident and I have been in trauma therapy for the last five years before that. Basically, I cannot have anything on my face, around my face. If it's minus 40 outside, you will not see me with my face covered because it just sends me into panic because I can't breathe. My breathing feels so restricted that I just— I'll have an anxiety attack.

Shawn Buckley

And you had a medical exemption for this.

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

For a mask, a legitimate one.

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

During any masking mandate.

Natasha Petite

Mm-hmm.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. Now, my understanding is, you had been on a career path in law enforcement.

Natasha Petite

Mm-hmm.

Shawn Buckley

And I'll ask this, when you go mm-hmm, we're not sure if you're saying "yes" or "no," so please use words.

Natasha Petite

Yes, sorry.

Shawn Buckley

So you were a corrections officer?

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And your plan was then to work from corrections into probation?

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And then into parole?

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And then segue into basically helping veterans and first responders who have PTSD and things like that, and help them cope. You had this all planned out, basically spending your entire career in law enforcement.

Natasha Petite

Yes. I wanted to be in law enforcement since I was ten years old.

Shawn Buckley

Yes, so a childhood dream for you.

Natasha Petite

Yeah, it was a dream.

Shawn Buckley

Yeah. Okay. Now, Christmas Eve 2021. Can you please tell us your story?

Natasha Petite

I was actually back in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia visiting my mother for Christmas, my family. And my mother and I went to Walmart at approximately 12:30, 1 o'clock in the afternoon to get some last-minute Christmas items.

And the lady at the door said, "Excuse me, you have to wear a mask." I told her I was exempt and she said, "I know," because she had seen me there actually two days prior. I was there on December 22nd and nobody said anything to me about it. So she said she had to call the manager and I said, "Okay, you call the manager, do what you have to do."

I was approached by the first manager, who told me, "You have to put a mask on or leave the store." I told him I was exempt and he said, "Where is your medical documentation?" I said, "Excuse me?" I said, "You can't ask me that. You're not my doctor. You're not a medical professional and you cannot ask me for my documentation." He made a comment of accusing me of lying or like, "How do we know you're not lying?"

Then he got the second manager who came and said the same thing: "You have to put a mask on or you have to leave." I said "I'm not going anywhere. I have a medical exemption." He also asked for my medical exemption letter,

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and I told him the same thing, "You cannot ask me for that, you're not a medical professional." They told me they had called the non-emergency police. So I said, "You do what you have to do, and I'm going to do what I have to do, and I'm going to continue my Christmas shopping."

So about 15 minutes later I was in the water aisle and one officer showed up and she said, "You need to put a mask on or leave." And I said, "Well no, I have a medical exemption." She also asked to see it, in which I explained to her that she is also not a medical professional and she does not have authority to ask me for such documentation. From there she said I need to put a mask on, again, or leave.

I questioned her about her mask because she was wearing one of those— It's like a stretchy bandana that she just pulled over her face. I made a comment about her mask not actually being a mask. From there we were just arguing back and forth; she called for the second officer.

The second officer arrived and he said the same thing: "You need to put a mask on, or you need to leave." I told him the same thing. I said, "I have a medical exemption. and I can't wear a mask." He asked me for the note. I told him, "I don't carry something like that with me and you can't ask."

So we argued back and forth and he said, "You know, wearing a mask is a mandate and you need to wear it by law." And I said, "Well no, by law, I don't. I do not have to wear it because a mandate is not a law, it's a recommendation, and I was recommended by a doctor to not wear a mask." So he called for officer number three.

Officer three came and he basically came right in there and said, "You're coming with me." I said, "I'm not going anywhere with you." He said, "You need to put a mask on or you need to leave right now." I said, "I don't need to do anything and I'm not going anywhere. I didn't break any laws. I'm here shopping like everybody else, and I have the right to do that."

Again, there was a back and forth, arguing over mandates and laws and who was right, who was wrong. I had just turned to reach for my cell phone. I thought this might be a good time to turn my camera on. And as I did that, officer number three grabbed my arm; the second officer grabbed this arm; I went forward into the shelving, which essentially bruised my

ribs; and then we wrestled, probably, I don't know, for a good minute; and they threw me down to the floor—my face at the floor. I'm sorry—my face hit the floor.

Shawn Buckley

Take your time.

Natasha Petite

And I knew there was somebody trying to hold down my feet. And my mother was with me. My mother yelled out, "She's a trained corrections officer," just to give them a heads up. So someone was trying to hold my feet. And officer number two was to my right side. Officer three was on my left side.

And I did, like, what we would call "the turtle." It's where you tuck everything in. It makes it harder for them to detain you. So that's what I did. And officer number two had slipped his arm underneath me. And he placed me in the choke hold, which— The choke hold is illegal in Canada since 1979. And I couldn't breathe. I kept trying to say that I couldn't breathe.

I told him I couldn't breathe. And he said, "If you can scream, you can fucking breathe." I really couldn't breathe. And I was having an anxiety attack at the same time because I couldn't breathe. I was having an anxiety attack and I couldn't breathe. And I could see stars. I knew I was passing out. I knew I was going to pass out. I talked to myself and, as hard as I was fighting, I said, "Natasha, you need to either give in or you're going to pass out."

I struggled so hard I ended up urinating myself.

So I gave in. My mom told them—sorry. My mom told them that I have issues with my shoulders and stuff from the accident so they used two pairs of cuffs because I can't put my hands behind my back. They flipped me over. And I was sitting on the ground, struggling to breathe, they told me to get up.

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And I'll be 100 per cent honest, I said, "You fucking took me down, you can fucking pick me up." And they picked me up and took me out to the police car.

Shawn Buckley

Can I just stop you? Were they told anything about your medical condition before they took you down?

Natasha Petite

Yes, because they were all asking to see my medical documentation and I wouldn't show it to them. I said, "It's none of your business, but if you must know, I said, I was in a car accident in 2018." And I said, "I have physical and mental disabilities."

Shawn Buckley

So they were told before they physically took you to the ground.

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

That you have both physical and mental disabilities—

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

That would complicate them taking you to the ground.

Natasha Petite

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, I'm sorry to interrupt. So you're telling us they'd now handcuffed you in front?

Natasha Petite

Yeah, they handcuffed me. One officer was on one side, one was holding my arm on the other side. And they took me out to the car. And I told the officer that had me in a choke hold, I told him that my cuffs were too tight; they were digging in my hands. And he didn't say anything. And I repeated myself and I said, "I know you heard me." And he didn't say anything. I said, "Well, why won't you loosen my cuffs?" And he was standing, like, right here, really, really close. I asked him why he wouldn't loosen my cuffs and he looked at me and he's like, "Because you're a fucking bitch."

Shawn Buckley

And what did you do in response to that?

Natasha Petite

I asked the girl that was with him, officer number one, I said, "Did you hear that, rookie?" Because I knew she was very new. I said, "Did you hear that rookie? What he said?" And she said, "Nope." I said, "Yeah, I thought so."

Shawn Buckley

Right, so basically you were confirming that the other officer, the young officer, was going to cover for the older one.

Natasha Petite

Yeah.

Shawn Buckley

So carry on. What happened after that?

Natasha Petite

After that, they placed me in the back of the police vehicle. Probably, I would say probably a good 20 minutes I waited. Then they took me to the police station, into lock up, and took all my belongings from me, and took my jacket off. They took the cuffs off. I asked for my cell phone right away to take pictures of my hands but I wasn't allowed to have access to it at that point.

And the senior officer, which would be officer number two, he said: "We're going to let you go today. There won't be any charges. You won't have anything on your record." And I said, "Well, I would hope not. Because I didn't break any laws and I'm not a fucking criminal."

So from there, my brother came and picked me up from the jail. And I didn't bother— I didn't go to the hospital or anything because I know they probably would have called the police again over a mask. So I just went home. But I do have pictures, I have photos. They busted my lip. I had a bruise here on my head, a bruise this side of my neck. I had lockjaw for about three days. I couldn't open my mouth because of the choke hold.

Shawn Buckley

Did you have a conversation, because my understanding is that you were taken to the police station by the first officer. Did you have a conversation with the first officer on the trip to the police station?

Natasha Petite

I did, yes.

Shawn Buckley

Can you tell us about that?

Natasha Petite

She told me that she had a three-year-old nephew who had asthma and even he wears a mask. And people like me were the reason why people were dying.

Shawn Buckley

Now, I'm curious. Because I'm just guessing that on Christmas Eve, Walmart is just packed with people. There must have been a whole bunch of people watching these three officers take you down after you explain to them that you have physical and mental disabilities. What can you tell us about— First of all, was there a crowd there, and what can you tell us about that?

Natasha Petite

Honestly, it was like I was a spectacle. There was people lined up from the beginning of the aisle right out to the door. And I was yelling when I was going out. I'm like, "How can you

people stand there and watch three police officers on one woman who has disabilities? How can you stand there and watch this and not say anything and not do anything?" And I asked them, "What happened to humanity? What happened to people's morals and values?" It was absolutely, just— I can't even really, like, explain the feeling. It was humiliating, degrading, embarrassing.

[00:15:00]

Shawn Buckley

And thank you for sharing. We can see that it's difficult. I don't have any further questions. And I'll just ask if the commissioners have any questions.

Natasha, it's very important that people like you tell us their stories. On behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, I'd like to thank you for sharing your story with us.

Natasha Petite

Thank you for doing this.

[00:15:52]



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The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an "intelligent verbatim" transcription method.

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