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## SPEAKERS

Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie?'), Shaamini Yogaretnam

### **Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie?') 00:00**

As a veteran officer, Ottawa Police Detective Helen Grus has spent time investigating child abuse, including difficult cases when a newborn suddenly dies. But now she is under investigation for allegedly trying to find out if the parents of infants who died during the pandemic had been vaccinated for COVID 19. CBC crime reporter Shaamini Yogaretnam has been looking into this story and joins me now. Good morning.

### **Shaamini Yogaretnam 00:27**

Good morning, Hallie.

### **Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie?') 00:28**

So incredibly sensitive. When a child, a baby, dies. So difficult for the families involved. When would an officer such as Detective Grus typically get involved?

### **Shaamini Yogaretnam 00:41**

They are really sensitive cases Hallie. A detective like Grus gets involved whenever there's an unexpected sudden death of a child. Police are mandated by law to investigate all of those cases. That includes cases like sudden sudden infant death syndrome, where there is no criminality, but still there are requirements for police and the coroner to ultimately investigate. SIDS parents for example, are routinely told how to navigate police involvement.

### **Shaamini Yogaretnam 01:12**

You know, yes, these cases are a check in a system so that no infant deaths escaped scrutiny. But these are cases where the most tragic time in a new parent's life is really just exacerbated by what is, you know, a very clinical and legal process that simply has to play out by law.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie'?) 01:33**

So what have you learned about these allegations against Detective Grus?

**Shaamini Yogaretnam 01:39**

We know that Grus was allegedly taking it upon herself to find out the vaccination status of parents whose infant had died during the pandemic. We know she was allegedly interfering in cases that weren't hers, allegedly using her position as a police officer to attempt to get access to the information. She was allegedly doing that by seeking information directly from the coroner, who is part of that system of checks and balances that investigates all the relevant medical information. Cops aren't doctors, right? They they they look at the law, and coroner's look at the medicine.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie'?) 02:19**

You keep on saying allegedly that this this story came about from sources. Why were the sources willing to speak out about this, do you think?

**Shaamini Yogaretnam 02:30**

Yeah, I keep saying allegedly because you know, these are allegations. No charges have yet been laid against her. But I did hear from sources. You know, the the unit in which Grus works is, is widely known to have some of the most sensitive detectives on the force. They deal with sexual assault and child abuse victims. You know, these are challenging emotion and trauma-heavy cases. I have no doubt that sources were motivated to speak about this because it's, you know, to their mind, a further victimization of who are innocent people who are having the worst time in their lives, that it strikes really at the heart of what police are supposed to do. You know, it's a it's a difficult subject to talk about, especially on the radio, but every single police officer has that 911 call that they attended on patrol to find an unresponsive baby and inconsolable parents. That's not an exaggeration. They are the most vulnerable of victims and and force-wide they are treated that way.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie'?) 03:37**

So So what do we know about detective Grus' views on vaccines or vaccine mandates?

**Shaamini Yogaretnam 03:45**

This is where the question of the questionable parts of of of Grus' alleged conduct really merit more scrutiny Hallie. We know according to sources that she opposed mandatory mask masks and vaccines in the workplace. We know that she was one of the fewer than 10 police officers who refused to comply with the force's mandatory vaccine policy. And that ultimately she was placed on unpaid leave as a result. So this is not a detective who who was not. You know, who

was not thinking about the things that she was doing. Certainly there were personal factors that had to be considered here.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie?')** 04:27

Have you spoken to her directly?

**Shaamini Yogaretnam** 04:30

Grus did not reply to my efforts to speak with her. We really don't know why yet. But given the parameters of who investigates what, we're we're kind of left with two options to my mind: that she was allegedly doing so for personal reasons, or that her own personal biases were allegedly affecting her police work.

**Shaamini Yogaretnam** 04:52

We don't know to what end she was allegedly doing this. Was this, you know, some sort of effort to find criminality for a medical decision of parents to be vaccinated? Or, you know, was it some kind of informal data collection? But if that was the point, a data collection to what end? Right. So, so police are, are continuing to investigate and hopefully answer those, those really important questions.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie?')** 05:19

You mentioned that she may have reached out to the coroner to get information. Did the coroner provide her with that information?

**Shaamini Yogaretnam** 05:28

Well, if they did, they're not telling us. The coroner would not answer any questions about their ongoing death investigations, or any ongoing internal Ottawa Police investigation.

**Shaamini Yogaretnam** 05:39

You know, it's not it's not unreasonable for a police officer to seek information for from a coroner. But it's certainly unreasonable for one to do so on cases on which they're not working. And it's not so much the flow of information. That's the problem. It's the intent of why that information was collected. So again, hopefully, a police investigation starts to give us some of those answers.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie?')** 06:07

What is the response from OPS at this point?

**Shaamini Yogaretnam** 06:11

So Ottawa Police have suspended her. Um, they say that they are taking the allegations against her very seriously and are continuing to investigate Grus' conduct. The service has

suspended her with pay. But the interesting thing here is that her leave for failing to get vaccinated was unpaid. That was the sanction based on her own choices and a workplace policy. Her suspension now as an Ottawa Police officer, puts her back on the public dime. And that will be the case while the investigation against her unfolds.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie'?)** 06:45

It's a fascinating story Shaamini. Thank you so much.

**Shaamini Yogaretnam** 06:49

Thanks, Hallie.

**Robyn Bresnahan ('Hallie'?)** 06:50

That's CBC crime reporter Shaamini Yogaretnam. You can read Shaamini's full story on our website [cbc.ca/ottawa](http://cbc.ca/ottawa)