

# DNA testing shows Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond ‘most likely’ has Indigenous ancestry she claimed: report

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Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is pictured here in a handout from the University of British Columbia.

SUPPLIED

The Law Society of British Columbia says DNA results from a test provided by lawyer Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, whose claims to Indigenous identity and academic achievements were questioned in a media investigation two years ago, show that she “most likely” has the Indigenous heritage she has claimed.

But the law society’s investigation also reprimanded and fined Ms. Turpel-Lafond \$10,000 after concluding she committed professional misconduct by

making misrepresentations in biographical information she has submitted to various bodies over the years.

“On July 16, 2024, the Chair of the Discipline Committee approved a consent agreement proposal submitted by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond,” read documents released by the society on Thursday. These findings say she misstated her professional credentials to the society and a public inquiry in 2018 and has “agreed to a reprimand and an order that she pay \$10,000 by August 31, 2024, to an organization that supports Indigenous justice initiatives.”

In an agreed statement of facts accompanying the decision, the law society says questions about Ms. Turpel-Lafond’s heritage were cleared up by a DNA test she took last year.

“The DNA test results indicate that genomic markers known to be disproportionately present in Indigenous populations are present in the lawyer’s DNA sequencing results,” the report says. The report goes on to say an unnamed expert in genetic lineages looked at the DNA test results and “opined that the individual whose DNA was analyzed most likely has very recent ancestors with substantial Indigenous DNA.”

No additional details were immediately released.

Ms. Turpel-Lafond’s background was questioned by an explosive CBC report in 2022 that cast doubt on her claim that she is a treaty Indian of Cree ancestry, while also questioning her claimed academic or career credentials.

For decades Ms. Turpel-Lafond was a widely respected figure in Canadian law serving as Saskatchewan judge and a legal scholar, as B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth and as director of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre (IRSDC). During her work as a lawyer and as a law professor, she became a member of several provincial bar associations including British Columbia.

But two years ago in the wake of the CBC story, she [left her job at UBC’s law school](#) and also [was removed from the Order of Canada](#) at her request. Several universities rescinded honorary degrees they had awarded her.

Ms. Turpel-Lafond released a statement Thursday saying the society’s findings were a vindication. “I am grateful to have this matter behind me. I was raised

by a Cree father and Scottish mother. I should not have had to prove who I am,” she said.

Her statement added that “allegations were wrongfully accepted as fact.”

Her lawyer, David Wotherspoon said in a statement that “the Law Society’s investigation is complete – it reflects what Mary Ellen has always said. She is Indigenous by birth.”

*More to come*

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-dna-testing-shows-mary-ellen-turpel-lafond-has-indigenous-ancestry/>

I’m sure there will be ... “[lots] more to come.”

I stand to be corrected, but I’m not sure these DNA results “vindicate” Mary- Ellen quite the way she would have us believe. (And why was such not introduced into the earlier original controversy?) My suspicion is that she projected back onto her childhood more “Indigenous heritage” than her “Cree father” lived out whatever his genetic heritage. Maybe a “family secret” really was kept such. And it was Indigenous people who questioned her claims as much, if not more, than the CBC team led by Geoff Leo. They could have published nothing that did not pass CBC legal approval, well aware that something like this could blow up afterwards. Geoff will be roused back into action, shifting up gears, by this development.

TJB