

2017-88 Halfyard vs Brandon Sun

*For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has mediated and dismissed a complaint about inaccuracy in an article in the Brandon Sun.

Complainant Meghan Halfyard said the December 12, 2017 article, “Pedestrian assaults driver who hit him”, was inaccurate in the description of the interaction and requested a correction or retraction.

The article was a four-paragraph account of an interchange between a motorist and pedestrian. The complainant stated she was not consulted about the story being published, nor contacted by the paper to confirm facts. She contacted the paper by email but declined to speak with a reporter.

The Brandon Sun said the information came from a Brandon Police Service news release, with names of those involved withheld. Without a person willing to speak on the record, the paper said there was no reason to challenge the official news release.

It is standard journalistic practice to use police media releases as news briefs. The police are generally considered to be a reliable source, and a paper has the discretion to decide which items are newsworthy. This article was of interest because the roles of protagonist and victim were somewhat different from the norm.

While the complainant stated the article is inaccurate, the issue centres on the matter of sources. Credible journalism relies on the widely accepted journalistic standard that sources can be verified.

The police media release provided the journalist opportunity to contact an officer for further information if needed. The complainant sent the paper an email, but declined the paper’s offer to talk about it or verify information.

As a remedy, the paper suggested the complainant could go to the police to discuss the alleged inaccuracy, and committed to follow up when the case goes to court. These are reasonable remedies in this situation.

Police reports are public information. The public good in being informed about police interaction with the public, such as arrests and charges, takes precedence over the right to privacy of individuals. In this case, the police and newspaper exercised discretion and respect for individual privacy by withholding names, which avoided issues around privacy or reporting on sensitive issues.

In consideration of the above factors, there is no breach of journalistic standards or ethics and no basis for the complaint.