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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: Terry Sheehan





## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Monday, November 24, 2025

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 13 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We recognize that we meet on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 24, 2025, the committee is continuing its study of indigenous policing and public safety.

I want to remind everybody of the little tips on how to help our interpreters out. Make sure that your mics are off when you're not speaking. If you're not speaking and you take your earpiece out, put it on the little placard. Leaving it in your ear is fine as well.

We have people joining online. Ginette is there. Somebody else who will be joining us online is Chief Michael Yellowback from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

I believe everyone has been tested, and they are okay for the interpreters.

Those folks who are online, if you wish to speak, use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will look for that, and we will recognize you.

I've introduced Chief Michael Yellowback, but we also have Lloyd Yew, chief executive officer, Turtle Island Private Investigators Inc.; and Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, National Family and Survivors Circle Inc.

You will each have five minutes, and then we'll go into our rounds of questions. As you get close to your five minutes, I will signal to you to wrap it up.

Let us begin with Lloyd, please.

**Lloyd Yew (Chief Executive Officer, Turtle Island Private Investigators Inc., As an Individual):** Thank you for inviting me, Mr. Chair.

*Kinanâskomitin.*

*Merci beaucoup.*

My name is Lloyd Yew. I'm an ex-member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I'm presently CEO of TIPI, Turtle Island Private Investigators.

TIPI was formed in February 2022 and since then has been working in first nations and Métis communities in northern Saskatchewan. As of this date, TIPI has worked in nine different communities. TIPI is made up of indigenous ex-RCMP members and ex-military. Each RCMP member brings different attributes to the team. Some were in the RCMP drug section, the special “O” section, the traffic services section, or in NCO i/c positions.

The TIPI team has two elders—one male, who is Cree, and one female, who is Dene. We have legal counsel, a K-9 unit, ex-pro hockey players and ex-university volleyball players.

TIPI utilizes technology to conduct its work, including top-end drones equipped with infrared, speakers and spotlights; vehicle surveillance cameras and body cameras; handheld infrared, high-end binoculars and cameras; and handheld and truck radios that work globally. TIPI was designed to help indigenous communities deal with social issues and challenges.

In northern Saskatchewan, communities and their leaders are overwhelmed with illegal drugs, gangs, prostitution, violence and suicides. The regular good people, especially elders and single parents, are scared and feel threatened. In one community, there were two separate occasions when elders were attacked in their own homes by people under the influence of drugs and alcohol. One of the elders ended up in the hospital with a broken arm.

TIPI responds to a variety of complaints, including attempted suicides. Just last week we dealt with a young lady who was trying to commit suicide. TIPI was called to the complaint as the RCMP was not available. When TIPI arrived at the scene and eventually broke into the residence, the young lady was found in the basement inside a furnace room. She had blocked the entrance door to it with a mattress. She had hanged herself. TIPI officers immediately grabbed the young lady, lifted her up, held her up while untying her, and then revived her. There are other examples where TIPI has saved lives.

TIPI creates partnerships within communities, with elders, leaders, rec directors, school health officials and the RCMP. The daily routines of TIPI involve patrolling streets 24 hours a day with fully marked security vehicles and drones. TIPI is regularly in contact with the RCMP to help locate people on warrants, respond to complaints with them and, at times, respond to their dispatch calls. TIPI assists them with searches, clearing buildings, guarding scenes and much more.

TIPI also monitors illegal activities, drug dealers and gang members, documenting and forwarding information to the RCMP. We respond to emergencies, and we also respond to missing people. We attend all community gatherings. We coach hockey, host volleyball clinics, mentor the youth, assist community nurses and ambulances, teach self-defence to frontline workers and assist band leadership with serving legal documents and whatever else they need. TIPI creates files and keeps stats for all the clients.

TIPI arrived in one northern community and responded to approximately 100 complaints per month for the first few months. Last month, the complaints went down by nearly 50%. One can see that TIPI's presence in the community is working. As part of this, we are working with the Métis Nation–Saskatchewan, the RCMP, the marshals and other groups to develop a province-wide community safety officer program to address what MN–S earlier this year called a state of emergency due to the crisis of drugs, violence and alcohol.

• (1535)

In closing, a comment we received as feedback from the RCMP who are stationed in the communities we work in was, “It's nice to know we can count on you guys having our backs.”

Thank you Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you Lloyd.

Next we are going to Chief Yellowback, who is joining us online.

Please begin, Chief.

**Chief Michael Yellowback (Chief, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs):** [*Witness spoke in Cree*]

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Chief Michael Yellowback, appearing today on behalf of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, which represents 63 first nations across treaties 1 through 6 and 10 in Manitoba. I am from the Manto Sipi Cree Nation in Treaty 5 territory.

I speak today not only as a chief but as a witness to the lived reality of our first nations citizens and to the systemic and structural failures and wide gaps in the current public safety and policing systems imposed upon us.

The message from our leadership is clear. Manitoba first nations face a crisis in public safety and well-being, and Canada's programs in supporting policing services and public safety in first nations are not addressing this crisis. The Manto Sipi Cree Nation and the first nations in northern Manitoba have been working for 24 years to establish our own regional self-administered first nations police service.

Northern Manitoba first nations have entered into two tripartite agreements between Canada, Manitoba and first nations to establish our regional police service. The first was on June 6, 2001. Since 2001, Canada has not made a budget commitment to provide 52% of funding to establish a new regional first nations police service in Manitoba under the first nations and Inuit policing program. We are concerned and deeply disappointed that there is no commitment in

budget 2025 to invest in first nations policing or to establish a new first nations self-administered policing service in Manitoba or anywhere in Canada.

In Manitoba, there are no standards for delivery of policing and public safety services in first nations. My community of 1,000 people is not connected to the all-weather road system, and we rely on scheduled air services and the increasingly brief, seasonal winter roads. We do not have a full-time RCMP detachment, and we do not see a boots-on-the-ground RCMP officer for three weeks out of every month. There is no identifiable standard that accepts the complete absence of police in a community for three weeks out of every month.

Across Manitoba, first nations are declaring states of emergency because of violence, addiction, inadequate housing conditions, youth vulnerability, wildfires, evacuations and long periods without any policing presence. Most of our first nations are like Manto Sipi and do not have a full-time RCMP detachment, and many have no detachment building or housing for police officers.

The Auditor General confirmed that the policing program is not based on risk of population, that allocated funds have gone unspent and that officer vacancies remain unresolved. We are asking this committee to recommend that the Government of Canada move forward with legislation to establish first nations policing as an essential service. We are asking the committee to recommend that Canada establish identifiable standards for delivery of policing and public safety services in first nations as part of establishing a first nations policing service as an essential service.

We are asking this committee to call on Canada to make a firm commitment to a path forward that includes concrete actions to support first nations led measures to protect our citizens. We saw this during the 2025 wildfire evacuations, and we also saw it during COVID-19, when first nations led our own emergency responses. We delivered first nations designed and controlled results that exceed those of federal and provincial systems.

Manitoba first nations are also advancing to be consistent with AMC chiefs-in-assembly mandates. The AMC and AMC member first nations are advancing as a practical and rights-based approach to respond to leadership concerns and issues. This really is a first nations public safety jurisdiction approach, centred on the following points:

One, first nations laws and justice principles must guide safety planning and must be supported with proper resources.

Two, Canada should work with AMC member first nations to co-develop Manitoba first nations-specific legislation consistent with UNDRIP that recognizes and implements first nations authority over public safety.

Three, the first nations, Canada and Manitoba tripartite table is needed to coordinate implementation, redesign and align the FNIPP with first nations policing priorities and principles for public safety.

Four, funding must be stable and multi-year based on the real needs of our first nations.

Five, Canada must invest in first nations institutions that carry safety into practice, including justice systems, healing programs, emergency management and local safety structures.

● (1540)

AMC is also asking this committee to recommend three additional key concrete actions to be taken by the Government of Canada:

One, immediately fix the gaps in the FNIPP. Address vacant positions, unspent funds and unreliable police presence. There is an urgent need for Canada to invest in the creation of new first nations self-administered policing services, an essential element of the foundation of long-term public safety and well-being in first nations.

Two, support and significantly expand first nations-led safety systems that are already working in Manitoba, including first nations safety officers, restored and enhanced enforcement of first nations laws and bylaws, community protection teams, land-based wellness supports and emergency response systems similar to what we used during COVID-19.

Three, concurrently, develop and co-draft with Manitoba first nations a clear path to first nations safety jurisdiction that is aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Manitoba aboriginal justice inquiry and the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This path must support first nations laws and lawmaking, enforcement mechanisms, and the safety systems our nations define, all based on principles of restorative justice.

First nations in Manitoba are already doing this work, strengthening our laws, enforcing our bylaws, building our own safety systems and protecting our first nations with the tools available to us, consistent with our first nations principles. We have the vision and mandate and the inherent authority to achieve public safety and well-being of our nations. What is needed now is for Canada to honour its obligations and support an UNDRIP-aligned transition to first nations safety jurisdiction.

We are asking this committee to work to recommend exactly this.

*Ekosi, kinanaskomitinowow.*

● (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief.

Hilda, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz (Chair, National Family and Survivors Circle Inc.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Hilda Anderson. I serve as the president of the National Family and Survivors Circle Inc. We are an indigenous-led and distinctions-based non-profit organization composed of family members of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, survivors of gender and race-based violence and our two-spirit and

gender-diverse relatives. For families, survivors and indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people, public safety is not a policy file or an abstract concept. It is about life and death. It is about whether someone's daughter, mother, sister, auntie or partner comes home safely at the end of the day. It is about whether families receive the respect and action they deserve when a loved one goes missing or is harmed.

Public safety for indigenous people is a human right that governments are obligated to fulfill. This obligation is reinforced by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, which affirms the inherent rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination and to live free from violence. However, despite these internationally recognized rights, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was clear that the ongoing cycle of violence that we see is rooted in colonialism, systemic racism and government inaction. It is not accidental, and it is not new.

I want to focus my remarks around what families, survivors and indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people need to see in order to transform public safety. These needs have been consistent for decades and are outlined clearly in the national inquiry's calls for justice. Today I will share eight key recommendations.

First, safety must be treated as a birthright. Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people are entitled to safety and well-being from the moment they are born. Governments must recognize this as a fundamental human right, and their actions and investments must reflect the truth.

Second, indigenous policing must be recognized in law as an essential service. Public safety in indigenous communities cannot depend on short-term funding cycles or shifting government priorities. It must be fully funded, legislated and designed to meet the real needs of communities.

Third, true transformation requires indigenous-led public safety systems. We cannot fix deeply entrenched problems by trying to adjust systems that were built without us and often against us. The path forward is indigenous-designed and distinctions-based public safety models that reflect community realities, cultures and rights.

Fourth, governments must implement the policing calls for justice without delay. Calls for justice 9.1 to 9.11 provide a clear, detailed road map for transforming policing. Families, survivors and indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people should not be waiting for action on commitments that we have known for years. Implementation must be immediate, transparent and accountable.

Fifth, public safety must be co-developed with indigenous governments. Indigenous nations know the solutions that work in their communities. Co-development must be genuine, grounded in the principles of indigenous self-determination and understood as a rights-based obligation.

Sixth, every decision must be guided by a human rights lens. Public safety cannot be treated as a program to be expanded or reduced based on budgets. These are human rights obligations. Governments have a responsibility to uphold them in policies, legislation and funding decisions.

Seventh, governments must fund the full scope of community-defined safety. Safety is more than policing. Families and survivors need investments in prevention, land-based and cultural programs, healing supports, victim services, crisis response and trauma-informed care. These supports must be long term and stable.

Eighth, families, survivors and indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people must be partners at every stage. Their knowledge, experience and leadership are essential to meaningful change. They are rights holders. We are not stakeholders. We must help design, implement and oversee public safety and systems.

Members of the committee, families, survivors and indigenous women and girls have been clear for decades. They have waited long enough for governments to act on what they already know. Public safety for indigenous people must be grounded in rights, co-developed with indigenous nations, and informed by those who have the lived consequences of systemic failure. Ending this crisis requires bold, urgent and coordinated action. It requires listening to families, survivors and gender-diverse people and honouring their leadership. It requires transforming public safety so that every indigenous woman, girl and 2SLGBTQIA+ person can live with dignity and without fear.

● (1550)

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go to our first round of six minutes with Jamie, please.

**Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC):** Thank you very much to our witnesses.

I'll start with Mr. Yew.

Thank you for your service as an RCMP officer, and thank you for your contributions.

You spoke about how there seems to be an increase in gang activity and in drug activity in some of the communities you are servicing. Do you have a few ideas as to why this is occurring with such frequency and violence now?

**Lloyd Yew:** Maybe I can go back to when I was a police officer in these communities. We didn't see as much violence, and we didn't see as many drugs. The leading cause is the drugs coming in to the community now, with crystal meth being so cheap. Of course, residential schools impacted their lifestyles, as well. For some of these kids, they never really had the parenting, the structure of a family. It's not there. The number of kids we deal with now...I don't know how to explain it. It's just that they don't even know right from wrong. That's what I'm trying to say. It's very sad.

With all these big city problems, back in the day, with the drugs and the violence happening in cities, those all came to the small towns, to these communities. The leaders and the teachers are overwhelmed with the problems now, as are the police services. There's the shortage of police services in northern Saskatchewan. I can only speak for northern Saskatchewan, where there are supposed to be five members, but it's down to one.

A neighbouring community is supposed to have, I believe, 19 police officers, but they're down to five. They're so busy responding to stuff. Again, it's because of the families, because of the residential schools. That's one of the main reasons.

**Jamie Schmale:** Do you find that the availability of assistance and help for those struggling with addictions is part of the issue as well?

**Lloyd Yew:** I'm sorry, but my hearing is a bit off.

**Jamie Schmale:** Mine is too. It's all good.

Do you find that the access to help for addictions is a barrier as well?

**Lloyd Yew:** Absolutely. We don't have any of that. We have a bit, where people can go to the clinic, but it's very limited. It's a must that northern Saskatchewan get that help.

One of our elders works as a mental health worker. He gets frustrated. I can understand it and see it. At the moment you need help, you don't get it. You have to wait in line for a long time. That's one of the big issues. People say, "Well, forget it," and they keep doing it.

**Jamie Schmale:** Ms. Anderson-Pyrz, you mentioned in your your remarks about the government not living up to its obligations for public safety, for one thing. You mentioned a bunch of recommendations.

Based on what you just heard from Mr. Yew and from our friend from Manitoba, are you happy with the level of crime that's going on in some of these communities? Do you feel that the government's not living up to that obligation at all, or is it getting further from the benchmark?

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** We can look at the history of the impacts of the Indian residential schools, and we can look at the intergenerational impacts and the decades of poverty that indigenous people have been living in. I see that every level of government that we've experienced in this country has never really addressed the root causes of violence and addictions that we face as indigenous people and in our communities.

It's more so when you're looking at the impacts on indigenous women and girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people. If you look at it from a gender lens, we're at further risk from inaction by governments to address the root causes of the systemic failures we continue to experience in 2025.

• (1555)

**Jamie Schmale:** I have time for only one question or maybe a couple, I think.

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Jamie Schmale:** One minute. Okay.

Hopefully, in a second round I'll come back to that, because I want to ask you about those root causes. I want to try to drill down into some of that.

I'll go quickly to Chief Yellowback.

In your testimony, you outlined a number of recommendations, but you also highlighted the recent agreement you signed. I think that's a positive step forward.

You mentioned that there are some issues with the funding formula. What we've been hearing in previous witness testimony is that it's year by year. It's often not lining up with fiscals, and there is a whole bunch of other issues around that. You mentioned it too. The year-by-year funding model isn't giving much certainty.

Do you want to expand on that?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds, Chief.

**Chief Michael Yellowback:** Well, in our community with our first nation safety officer officer program, we get about \$42,000 in funding, yet we expend close to \$400,000 annually.

That's one of the major challenges we face in our community: to try to ensure public safety in the absence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in our community, so doing our—

**The Chair:** Thanks, Chief.

**Chief Michael Yellowback:** Okay.

**The Chair:** I'm sure you'll be able to get the rest of that out in the next round of questioning going forward.

Brendan, you have six minutes, please.

**Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.):** Thank you to the three of you for being here and for your testimony.

Mr. Yew, I'd like to start with you.

Towards the end of your written testimony, there's a really interesting quote. You said that the quote from your RCMP colleagues was that "it's like having extra...officers...here". Your presence is obviously appreciated, but I imagine that your presence adds a dif-

ferent dimension than what the RCMP core service offers. Could you touch on that?

**Lloyd Yew:** When we go to a community, we go to the heart of the community and we offer our services to everybody, including the police and the RCMP. In most places, we're there because there's a lack of police, and they need help. When we attend, we form a kind of unwritten partnership, where we're there to help: What do they need? Who do they need?

There are some times, too, where special forces are needed to come to the community. At times, because we're there, they utilize our equipment, especially drones. I'll give you an example. In one community, there was a person inside a house, possibly with a gun. The police opened the door for us and we flew our drone in and cleared it, instead of having them wait for half a day for an emergency response team to come. These are the things we do with the RCMP.

**Brendan Hanley:** That's very impressive.

I was also impressed that—again, towards the end of your opening remarks—you talked about community safety officers and a need for CSO programming around Saskatchewan.

I'm curious as to whether, either through listening in on previous versions of this committee's meetings or directly, you know that Yukon has implemented CSO programs in a number of communities.

What is your networking like with other CSO programs around the country? What is the model? What are the important elements of CSO that you think are really important to reflect?

I'll ask you to be as brief as possible so that I can ask another couple of questions. Thanks.

**Lloyd Yew:** I know of two CSOs in northern Saskatchewan. Both of them lack.... They are hardly trained. They're intimidated because they're in their communities. They can't enforce bylaws there because they're all related and stuff.

When Métis Nation approached us.... We don't belong to that community. We're ex-police officers and we can teach our kids how to be a CSO. Not only that, if TIPI were to get that status, we would be able to have pepper spray. Right now, we only have a baton and handcuffs. There are times when my guys are assaulted and stuff like that. That would be a little something that we could have to protect ourselves.

The training we have already we are passing on to our other guys, just so they can be fully.... We want our guys to start thinking like police officers, just like us, because we're preparing a lot of these kids to get to the next level, which is joining the police forces.

• (1600)

**Brendan Hanley:** Thank you very much. I would love to go on, but I'm going to ask Ms. Anderson-Pyrz a couple of questions.

Part of the original motion for this study has a clause in it that says, “The study should also look at the obstacles and systemic racism within the justice system and examine what barriers exist that prevent Indigenous people from becoming law enforcement officers.” I think we’ve partly addressed that throughout the study, but perhaps not fulsomely enough.

You also mentioned calls for justice 9.1 to 9.11. Call 9.6 is for “all police services to establish an independent, special investigation unit for the investigation of incidents of failures to investigate, police misconduct, and all forms of discriminatory practices”, and it goes on. I want to get your reflections, particularly in the area of systemic racism, on how well we’re addressing that and how much more we need to do.

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** Coming from the lens of an indigenous woman and someone who is leading a lot of the work surrounding gender- and race-based violence against indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people, I think a lot of work needs to be done, considering that, as I sit here today, when indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people are seeking the support of policing, they’re continuously being devalued and are treated with discrimination, disrespect and racist behaviours. It’s critical to mention that they devalue the lives of indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people by not taking our complaints seriously, not searching for us but disregarding us, saying that we’re out partying or are out on a hiatus and will come back later or will show up later.

The national inquiry report, when it was launched in 2019, clearly indicated and demonstrated the systemic issues related to policing. It was problematic from coast to coast to coast, and here we are in 2025. I have my ear to the ground, and I continuously hear that this is still very problematic and we need to address it. We need to ensure that the policy and legislation in place hold the systems, not individual police officers, accountable. When we hold the systems accountable, that’s when we will see transformative change and when we as indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people in this country will feel safe accessing the resources that are supposed to protect us, not discriminate against us.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us.

In regions like mine, Abitibi—Témiscamingue, communities such as—

[*English*]

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** The translation is not working.

**The Chair:** The clerk will go over and help you. It might be the volume.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you for being with us, Mr. Yew.

In regions like mine, Abitibi—Témiscamingue, we observe that communities like Notre-Dame-du-Nord are reporting an increase in the number of break-ins, thefts and acts of vandalism. In the last week, we have heard numerous witnesses. They have told us that organized criminal groups are deliberately exploiting gaps in policing, particularly in rural areas and on indigenous reserves that do not have sufficient resources. This is true in Quebec, on the Côte-Nord and in Ontario. I think it is also true in Manitoba.

Based on your experience in investigation, how does organized crime use these gaps in policing across provincial borders to their advantage?

What trend are you observing when it comes to the mobility of these groups between first nations and neighbouring non-indigenous communities?

• (1605)

[*English*]

**Lloyd Yew:** I’m sorry. There was no translation.

**The Chair:** We’ll suspend for a moment.

• (1605)

(Pause)

• (1605)

It’s working now.

Go ahead, Monsieur Lemire.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you for being with us, Mr. Yew.

In regions like mine, Abitibi—Témiscamingue, we observe that communities like Notre-Dame-du-Nord are reporting an increase in the number of break-ins, thefts and acts of vandalism. In recent weeks, we have heard numerous witnesses. They have told us that organized criminal groups are deliberately exploiting gaps in policing, particularly in rural areas and on indigenous reserves that do not have sufficient resources.

Based on your experience in investigation, how does organized crime use these gaps in policing across provincial borders to their advantage?

What trend are you observing when it comes to the mobility of these groups between first nations and neighbouring non-indigenous communities?

[*English*]

**Lloyd Yew:** There’s a lack of policing. Of course, the bad people recognize that. I believe that’s one of the main reasons crime is escalating, at least where I’m working in northern Saskatchewan.

There's not enough policing and not enough police presence. Although the police are there at times, back in my day, we didn't have to feed the computer. Nowadays, the police have to feed a computer. They're removed from the streets to work on their computers in the office. Back in the day, we were out patrolling and writing everything. Our visibility was there. Now there's none.

Youth are also seeing this. It's easy to influence a young person. Drug dealers are using these young people because with the Youth Criminal Justice Act, they don't have to do time. The courts are very lenient on stuff like that. That's why the bad guys are using them to transport their drugs and do crimes. We see a lot of crimes happening. Break and enter is happening to support the addictions they have.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** In smaller local communities all across Canada, police services, whether municipal, provincial or federal, may not be capable of acting rapidly, one reason being geographic distances, something you did mention in your presentation.

Based on your experience, is it possible for an indigenous police service to be able to take action in a non-indigenous jurisdiction?

Would express expansion of indigenous police services' mandate enhance people's feeling of peace even outside indigenous communities?

[English]

**Lloyd Yew:** I'll give you an example. I'm a guy who was born and raised on a trapline. When I joined the force, it was called Canada's finest. Join the RCMP and see Canada. What would the attraction be if we had an aboriginal secondary police force? I keep asking myself that.

You asked about non-aboriginal communities. I don't see an issue with that if they were to police non-indigenous communities. We have those communities living close. They're side by side. At the same time, we need the police there. We need the federal RCMP to be in these communities.

Right now, I see the interference from politics already doing extra stuff. That's what worries me when it comes down to stuff like that.

• (1610)

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Can you also address the importance of communication among the various police forces, whether indigenous or non-indigenous?

I am thinking particularly of communication between the RCMP and indigenous police forces and communication with the Sûreté du Québec and the Ontario Provincial Police.

How could we make actions taken in cases involving organized crime more effective, in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities?

I get the impression that communication needs to be maintained between the various police forces and the various communities.

What do you think?

[English]

**Lloyd Yew:** Communication has to go both ways, but at the end of the day, is it really working? We have the marshal program right now in Saskatchewan. I hear both sides...not accepting from both parties. I'm not talking about the whole...just small talk with one individual.

With regard to communication, when I was a police officer, communication about all that information with other city police forces was there. I can't see the whole problem in any of that with regard to an indigenous-led police force communicating and stuff like that. It would be something for all communities to enjoy.

When I first started TIPI, the police didn't know how to take us. We had to keep going until they finally felt comfortable with us. It would be the same thing with that, I guess.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll go to Billy for five minutes, please.

**Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests for coming to speak today.

I'll go to you, Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

Currently, sentencing judges and parole boards are not required to consider an offender's refusal to disclose the location of their victims' remains in their decisions. Your organization serves a lot of families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and LGBTQ people, and currently, judges are not taking into account when sentencing the disclosure or non-disclosure of remains.

Recently, my colleague Dane Lloyd, the MP for Parkland, introduced Bill C-236, which seeks to support families and honour homicide victims by ensuring that they receive the justice and respect they deserve. It adds stronger penalties to offenders convicted of crimes resulting in death if they refuse to disclose the location of their victims' remains.

As the chair of the National Family and Survivors Circle Inc., do you see this as being beneficial in helping the families you serve?

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** Absolutely. You're looking at families who are impacted by the national crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people. If they know where their loved ones' remains are, they can bring them home and honour them in a ceremony, and they can heal and rebuild their lives around their tragic loss. It's critically important when you look at how it impacts the family and the community.

Giving a perpetrator that much power is also very harmful, considering the crimes they've committed. Their disclosing where the victims are is really important, especially when we know that the large number of indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people who die as a result of homicide in this country.... It's a really critical component of what we're seeking when we look at that journey of justice, because we know that journey of justice is very complex when it comes to indigenous women and girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people.

We often do not seek or receive the justice within the justice system because we know it's continuously plagued by systemic failures.

• (1615)

**Billy Morin:** Thank you for your answer. I wholeheartedly agree about the closure and the ceremony aspects of having a loved one go back to the spirit world.

Chief Yellowback from Manitoba, there was a lot of talk about industry development up in Treaty 5. You have Manitoba Hydro and Churchill in that area. There's a lot of new contemplated industry and resource extraction going on up there, with economic development opportunities. With those opportunities come some bad characters and actors.

Can you talk about how your communities are still in crisis? You used the word "crisis", but you're not seeing that meaningful engagement to take care of this crisis, and you're still being pressured to participate in large economic projects.

**Chief Michael Yellowback:** As a collective, we are a part of the Keewatin Tribal Council. The 11 communities declared a state of emergency in March 2023. It's been two and a half years since that declaration and nothing has been done to try to improve the plight of our people with what they're going through in terms of addictions, violence and the drug trafficking that's going on in our communities.

One of the things that's most prevalent in our communities is the lack of police resources. Our community of Manto Sipi has been involved in a pilot project whereby we enacted our intoxicants bylaw. We have the ability to search and give our first nation safety officers enhanced powers and authority as peace officers. However, that is not enough, as our first nation safety officers are not trained like the RCMP.

Recently, I was told that several weeks ago we had a 33-year-old young man who died from a vicious attack by four youths. He succumbed to his injuries four days later. We had another young woman two years ago who passed away due to homicide as well.

Those are the realities we face in our community and the systemic issues that we face when it comes to first nation policing in our communities. It's not acceptable. The nearest detachment that we have to our community is about 60 kilometres away, and sometimes it's very challenging when it's all they have. When the RCMP have to respond to serious matters, sometimes it takes three days to respond—three days. That's not acceptable in the land called Canada.

It's very disturbing, and yet in Canada, whether we have had Conservative governments of the past or the current and past Liberal governments, they throw money to foreign governments for their public safety. That's not right when they cannot, in their own backyard, address the systemic issues of first nation policing in our communities.

It's time that Parliament addresses this serious issue. That's why we need to have a permanent RCMP presence or even our own policing services in our communities. It's time to invest, train and adequately fund those, to help these issues in our community in terms of policing presence.

One thing I'd like to add is that I had one member of Parliament ask about law enforcement officers and why there's a lack of indigenous youth when it comes to law enforcement.

My own son, since he was a little child, dreamed of becoming an RCMP officer, but because of the tedious challenges he had to go through in the process he quit. He just quit. He went to the University of Winnipeg to take the criminal justice program. However, there were some tedious applications that he had to go through, so he just quit pursuing his dream of becoming an RCMP officer. It was too tedious for him.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief, for sharing that.

The time has expired.

Now we'll go to you, Ginette, for your questions for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.):** Hello, everyone.

You have my sincere thanks for being here today to testify before the committee.

I would first like to address Chief Yellowback.

When it comes to public safety, how do you think self-determination should guide future federal law reform, particularly when it comes to local governance and community decision-making?

[*English*]

**Chief Michael Yellowback:** One of the things for us is that during the COVID pandemic, we had our own first nations indigenous-led governments that addressed the public health and safety of our people. It worked very well, including when we had our wildfire situations in 2024 and 2025.

That's one thing that propelled us to a point where I feel we can administer our own policing service reform. If you give us the legislation to create and administer our own policing forces, we as a people will know how to serve our people and their needs, and will have the understanding, which, I'm told, the RCMP do not possess. We will understand the plight of our people in terms of the systemic issues that we faced in the past, plus identify the root causes that our people are facing, whether it's through the CFS system of the past, or even from Indian residential schools. That's one thing we are advocating for, to create, through self-determination, our own first nation policing forces and services.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Thank you.

What do you think is essential in order to ensure stable multi-year funding that would enable indigenous police services to provide a level of service comparable to what is provided by provincial police forces?

[English]

**Chief Michael Yellowback:** Well, I believe we need to have an adequate amount that will add to the infrastructure, the training and the usual human resources needed to address that, based on the population of our indigenous communities, including in remote, isolated communities like ours of Manto Sipi. There needs to be a firm commitment from Canada, including the Province of Manitoba, to work with our indigenous governments in Manitoba—that this could be totally across Canada as well—that the policing service is an essential item for our community.

Another thing we are also facing is that when there are serious issues like assaults or domestic issues, they are not being treated in a manner similar to when these issues occur in an urban environment. Sometimes we have to wait two weeks before the RCMP come to our communities to investigate—two weeks. That's not right. That's one of the things we want to change.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Thank you.

Ms. Anderson-Pyrz, you mentioned the need to have an independent national ombud.

Could you explain what that role involves and how it could improve safety and accountability in indigenous police services?

• (1625)

[English]

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** When we're looking at a place for indigenous people to go to share their experiences and for there to be oversight and accountability that can compel governments to respond in a way that addresses the issues that are being presented, and to change the systemic issues that indigenous people are experiencing in really upholding their inherent and human rights, it's really critical that we have an ombudsperson and oversight. Without accountability and oversight, we're going to continue to have the same lived experiences as we're having right now. This is why, especially with the National Family and Survivors Circle, we continually push for call for justice 1.7. That specific call is critical. Regardless of what government is in power and regardless of what

their priorities are, we need to have a mechanism that we can utilize to help uphold our inherent and human rights in this country.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Sébastien for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here for the cause you champion, Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

This issue has been taken seriously in Quebec. I imagine you are aware that since September 1, 2021, there has been a law designed to support indigenous families in their efforts to get answers about their child's disappearance or death following admission to a health or social services institution before December 31, 1992. That law authorizes the disclosure of personal information to the families of indigenous children who disappeared or died following admission to an institution.

Three and a half years after the law came into force, we have seen that 121 families have applied to the family support branch of the first nations and Inuit relations secretariat and its partner, the Awacak Association. I would also like to recognize the leadership of Françoise Ruperthouse, general manager of the association. This has shed light on the case of 209 children who disappeared or died following admission to an institution.

Might a law like that be needed in Canada?

Most importantly, should there be more transparency regarding the information in the government's possession about the past of children who disappeared or died, in order to shed light on their cases? It seems very unclear to me.

[English]

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** You've asked me a very complex question, but I'll try my best to address it.

It's critical that we have mechanisms that are legislated when it comes to missing persons. Often when an indigenous woman, girl, or two-spirit or gender-diverse person goes missing and the family is seeking the support of policing, they're ignored, or they're the ones on the ground organizing searches to look for their loved ones. Another thing that's very problematic is jurisdictional boundaries when it comes to missing indigenous women. There's a lack of transparency, a lack of sharing of systems and a lack of collaboration of systems. If we look at how we implement all of that, we can be very solutions-focused and address how we can respond more adequately.

In Manitoba, as an example, they're doing a study on the implementation of the red dress alert and how that could really support missing indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people. I believe the report is going to be launched tomorrow on how Manitoba would pilot this initiative to be responsive to missing indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people. When we see systems being built in response to missing indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people, it says to this country that people do care about us and want to work toward collectively ending the genocide of indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

**The Chair:** Eric, you have five minutes, please.

**Eric Melillo (Kenora—Kiiwetinoong, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the individuals for joining us today.

Mr. Yew, you spoke quite a bit about the collaboration between your organization and law enforcement, as well as between indigenous and non-indigenous police services. Can you speak to how much more robust or how that collaboration could be even easier if indigenous police services were properly resourced and given the recognition they deserve?

• (1630)

**Lloyd Yew:** In indigenous-led police services, these police officers would be coming from our indigenous communities. The understanding they would have of the communities they're taking care of would be enormous and to the benefit of the communities. When I was a police officer, I could see the immediate connection I had with these communities. To this day, when we're out doing what we're doing right now, we're accepted right away by the communities. That's the bonus of an indigenous-led police force.

**Eric Melillo:** I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

I do have some limited time, so I'd like to follow up on that.

You've spoken a lot about the lack of resources and how challenging it is. I know that the government has made it a priority for themselves to target law-abiding firearms owners and to confiscate firearms from indigenous peoples and from Canadians across the country who have not committed any crimes. The government is putting a lot of resource and effort into that.

Do you agree with that approach of the government, confiscating firearms from law-abiding firearms owners, or do you feel that with the lack of resources, more resources should be put towards actually stopping the crime?

**Lloyd Yew:** Most of this stuff we're dealing with, for my company is.... Let's put it this way: Every household has guns. In northern Saskatchewan, we all hunt for survival.

What kinds of guns are we talking about here? They're high-calibre rifles, semi-automatics—I believe they're referred to as “semi-

automatics”—and stuff like that. I have no issue with those being removed. We don't need them.

**Eric Melillo:** How about the SKS? I know it's one that's commonly used for hunting.

**Lloyd Yew:** Yes. We don't use those to hunt. We use normal rifles to go hunting with, with one single shot. Why would we need rifles that can shoot boom, boom and bang, bang and stuff?

Yes, I agree that they should be removed from the streets, these semi-automatic, high-powered rifles, whatever they are. I'm not too familiar with what they're trying to remove, but at the same time, it's like handguns. Why do we need handguns?

**Eric Melillo:** I appreciate that.

I think there are a number of firearms—shotguns, the SKS, and a number of long guns—that are used for hunting. It is a concern I've heard, but I take your point, and I appreciate the feedback.

I'd like to move to Chief Yellowback now with the time I have left.

I'm one of your geographical neighbours on the other side of the border, in Ontario. In the communities I serve, we're really seeing an increase in drugs, gang activity and human trafficking, unfortunately, in a lot of the remote fly-in communities.

This is something that has been increasing across northern Ontario. Do you see similar challenges increasing in northern Manitoba as well?

**Chief Michael Yellowback:** Yes, that's what we've been seeing. At the intelligence gatherings that we've seen, it's the same thing we're seeing.

In particular, we have organized crime coming out of Toronto, infiltrating our young people who are 17 and under, flying them to Winnipeg, putting them in high-end hotels and buying them all of that high-brand clothing. Then they use them to smuggle drugs into our community. That's the intel we have been receiving from the RCMP and also in our own intelligence gathering. It's very sad, what we are seeing.

We had one youth who, I was told, was involved in that homicide that I talked about, a few weeks ago. He was charged with that vicious attack on this 33-year-old man. There's that and there's also their involvement in drug trafficking. I was told that they're bootlegging as well.

We see that every day in our community. That's one of the things we need to get more police presence for in our community. That will change this. We need all parliamentarians to change the laws that we face in our communities, including the systemic failures that we see in our communities.

I did make a presentation to this committee in Ottawa last year about the Canada Post amendments. Canada Post is being used to smuggle in drugs. That's one of the things. This sort of illegal contraband is coming in through the mail.

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief.

Next is Philip for five minutes, please.

**Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

Thank you for your testimony. You spoke very clearly, and I appreciate everything you told us today.

If we would agree that crime is increasing at a rapid pace, especially in indigenous communities, and that safety appears to be regressing—you spoke about the importance of co-development and acknowledging that crime appears to be on the rise—could we, just for a second, imagine that it's a two-lane highway and that as we're combatting crime we want to, in a parallel fashion, co-develop policies for a better result?

Could you talk to us about how you envision that and how you may see that taking place?

**Hilda Anderson-Pyrz:** Absolutely.

When looking at co-development, especially when you're looking at crime, the perpetrators of crime, the reasons behind crime and root causes as well, it's quite complex. I always look at being indigenous and how we build systems from a circular model of care, building all the supports and resources that we need to combat crime but also to heal the perpetrator and heal the victim. It has to come from a circular model of care and ensuring that it's indigenous-led and rooted in indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. We're working with another system that often doesn't recognize that. How do we get colonial systems to adopt our processes?

To create legislation that supports that is challenging. It's a continuous challenge that we see all the time. If we were able to do that, we would see results on the ground. We would see that impact if we were able to co-develop but also create. Relationships are really important when we're doing co-development. Those respectful and reciprocal relationships are very important. If we could do that collaboratively and have the support and the resources and the long-term sustainable commitment....

Why it's critical to put into policies and legislation is that we shouldn't be on government agendas. These are our lives that we're talking about. We need that safety, security, healing and well-being and to have our human security and our human rights upheld.

**Philip Earle:** Thank you.

Mr. Yew, thank you for telling us about your company, TIPI. I think I understand very well how it's structured, and I commend you on your involvement of elders and so on.

Would you suggest that your business came about because of necessity, or did it come about because of opportunity?

**Lloyd Yew:** Necessity is one of the main reasons. We're seeing what's happening throughout northern Saskatchewan, and we're seeing fewer and fewer police forces.

We were seeing a lot of stuff happening, and we knew we could be part of the solution by offering our services and stuff.

**Philip Earle:** You talk a lot about working with the RCMP. I realize that you're in northern Saskatchewan. Do you have any experience of working with first nations policing versus working with

the RCMP? If you do, is there a marked difference between working with the two in your experience?

**Lloyd Yew:** No, we don't have first nations policing in our area other than File Hills, which is in southern Saskatchewan. We're in northern Saskatchewan.

**Philip Earle:** I have time for one last question for you.

As you work diligently to assist the communities, what is the one thing that interferes most with the services that you try to provide?

• (1640)

**Lloyd Yew:** I'm sorry, what's...?

**Philip Earle:** As you work with the various communities to do the great work that you're doing, what's the one thing that interferes with your ability to work with those communities? Is there one thing?

**Lloyd Yew:** I guess we don't have any issues with anybody. Everybody accepts us. The problems we face at times are because of the lack of policing.

When we do private investigations and forward that information to the police force, they don't respond as I would respond with regard to stepping up and going a little bit faster with regard to drug dealers and stuff.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That brings us to the very end.

Thank you to our witnesses.

I will remind our witnesses and people listening that, if they wish, they can still make submissions in writing to the clerk to be included in the study.

We're going to suspend for a minute. Let's have a quick turnaround.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Welcome back.

We're going to start our second round.

We have, appearing as individuals, Lyle Herman, mayor of the northern village of La Loche; and Sheila North, indigenous advocate and adviser. From the Prince Albert Grand Council, we have Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie.

You each have five minutes.

We will start with Sheila.

**Sheila North (Indigenous Advocate and Advisor, As an Individual):** [ *Witness spoke in Cree* ]

[ *English* ]

Hi, everyone.

My name is Sheila North and I'm from the Bunibonibee Cree Nation in northern Manitoba. I'm very happy to be here with you to talk about what I know about policing as a former grand chief of my region in northern Manitoba, a former journalist in Manitoba and across Canada and, now, as an adviser to the Winnipeg Police Service.

Policing is deeply rooted in the history and lived experiences of first nations people. For countless generations, there have always been roles within our nations dedicated to keeping our people and communities safe. These were, and continue to be, the natural keepers of peace—the protectors responsible for our survival and well-being.

I know that this committee has already heard many accounts about what is missing in indigenous policing. Much of it comes down to two things: a lack of funding and a lack of political will. I agree with this assessment, and I want to emphasize again that the role of *simâkanisak*, police, has always existed among first nations and will continue to exist. What we need now from governments, federal, provincial and municipal, is to recognize that authority and to provide the resources necessary for our communities to be safe.

As you've likely heard in the news and from your constituents, crime is a real concern. We are seeing increasing incidents of drug- and alcohol-related crimes. People are being hurt and, in some cases, as you know, losing their lives all because of rising tension and crime in communities, including in first nations.

To address crime and improve public safety, resources must be released for training, equipment, infrastructure and new technologies, like body-worn cameras. We also need to recognize that indigenous policing is not always the same as mainstream policing. Those differences must be respected. Part of that means ensuring indigenous people can see themselves in these roles so that when someone is in crisis, they can look to someone who understands their community, their language and their culture.

There are many examples showing that crime decreases when first nations police their own communities. I'm sure you've heard some of them during the study; in fact, I know you just did in the first group. I can add that my own community of Bunibonibee Cree Nation and others have seen drops in crime, increased feelings of safety and stronger governance when first nations police and peace officers have been present.

Instead of denying resources that are needed, we should focus on improving recruitment of indigenous police officers not only in first nations police forces but also in the RCMP and municipal agencies, such as the Winnipeg Police Service. We need officers who speak first nations languages and who know their communities, and yes, even those individuals who have a criminal past but have demonstrated real determination to make a positive change, but have trouble getting into the forces. These individuals deserve access to training and, in some cases, to pardons that allow them to serve as a *simâkanis*, police officer.

What we need most are culturally sensitive, trauma-informed officers who understand their people and their communities.

In closing, yes, there is a long and well-documented history of policing within first nations. Yes, funding and recognition of first

nations policing authority remain major issues, and, yes, we have strong examples showing what first nations policing does and how it works. That is needed more than ever.

Ultimately, this, to me, is about self-determination in policing. It aligns with recommendations you have already heard in this study and with the findings of the MMIWG calls for justice, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the aboriginal justice inquiry and many other important reports.

[ *Witness spoke in Cree* ]

[ *English* ]

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Sheila.

Go ahead, Lyle, for five minutes, please.

**Lyle Herman (Mayor, Northern Village of La Loche, As an Individual):** Good afternoon. Thank you for having me.

I'm Lyle Herman, the mayor of La Loche. I am also from the first nation band CRDN, Clearwater River Dene Nation. Also, while here, I will be representing the north. I am the vice-president of the northern caucus of SUMA, which governs 35 communities in the north, which is why I'm here today.

We've heard many testimonies today about the RCMP shortage. To highlight what was said earlier, I will say that sometimes I have a population of nearly 4,000, with a neighbouring reserve—my reserve—with a population of 1,500. Also, the RCMP does go to other communities. The closest one is about 45 minutes away, and it has just under 2,000 residents. With regard to the shortage, there should be a policy to have temporary coverage while recruiting more permanent officers, and this could possibly go into effect when staffing drops to 90%. The shortage leads to a high number of case files per officer, which leads to cases not getting the attention they need. This also leads to burnout.

We need to improve accountability for repeat offenders. This catch-and-release program, which I have been notified doesn't seem to exist, seems to be there. This model not only is detrimental to the community members who are being repeatedly victimized but also is unfair to those RCMP officers who are being seen as ineffectual by the community. This causes negative community sentiment towards the RCMP and more brazen illegal activity by a criminal element who no longer fear incarceration.

At one time, I was down in my community, where we have five officers. They told me that if they get a call to a neighbouring community, which is 40 minutes away, and at the same time there's a break and enter, if it's domestic violence that's happening 40 minutes away, then two officers have to leave the community to attend that. By the time they come back, nearly two to three hours have gone by. We may have a staff of five, but that doesn't mean they're constantly on 24-7. The lack of policing has an effect on the crime rate going up.

We need access to funding to train community members to become safety officers. Having trained citizens hired to assist with maintaining public order would benefit communities across the north that are struggling with rising crime. We also need to address the rampant drug trafficking in the north. We need detox, addictions counselling and other supports for those who need the help. There is currently very little support for those trying to move to a healthy lifestyle.

I have always been a bold believer of getting to the root cause. One of the highlights of the issues in the north is housing. If we do not have local, qualified members to fill these positions, then how can we attract outside professionals when we can't house them? I had many meetings with the SHA with regard to this. I told them this in two meetings. At the second meeting, I told them that they were wasting my time. If we have no housing for these people, then why was I being invited there? When I spoke to SHA officials, I said, "I understand there are 12 to 15 vacancies for mental health therapists." Now, with this crisis going on, I had a teacher recently leave. I have health care staff, nurses and doctors, who are threatening to leave because of the ongoing break and enters. One teacher left about two weeks ago. There had been six break-ins since she arrived in La Loche full-time.

In closing, we need to get to the root causes, but a lack of policing also causes the rise in criminal activity, and these criminals know it.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Vice-Chief Joseph, go ahead, please.

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie (Vice-Chief, Prince Albert Grand Council):** Thank you.

*[Witness spoke in Denesuline]*

*[English]*

My name is Joseph Tsannie. I'm currently the vice-chief of the Prince Albert Grand Council. I've been serving as a community leader since a very young age as a councillor for my first nation Treaty 10 territory up in Hatchet Lake from the age of 18. I've been advocating for community activities to try to change the story at a very young age, trying to provide youth programming, volleyball, etc., to get our young people into mainstream sports to build leaders. To change those stories and for them to have those opportunities, I think it starts at the community level. However, coming from an isolated community, with no road currently—we're building a road that will be completed next fall to one of our communities—it's about giving those opportunities to our young people, having

access to quality sports and rec programs in our communities. Land-based education is continually happening in our communities, so it's very important.

In 2012, I was elected to the grand council. A lot of my time was spent just being the mediator with the RCMP in our communities. You heard today about the challenges with alcohol and drugs coming into our communities. About a year and a half ago, our health staff notified me and said that we have meth in all of our communities now. It continues to be a challenge. Our leaders at the community level continue to call me asking me to do something about the RCMP in the community. One of the leadership said to me, "Why are they even in our communities when they're not willing to work with us?" A lot of times the intervention I do is bringing people together, getting them to talk and try to come up with solutions.

In 2018, I got tired of weekly interventions with the RCMP, so I asked for a mandate from our 12 chiefs within the grand council. We tried to start our own police force for the grand council. We have 28 communities. We have a Dene community, a Cree community, a Swampy Cree, Plains Cree, Dakota and Woodland Cree within the grand council. In 2019 we hadn't been in the process of developing our own police force, so we developed a road map. We brought in the Navajo Nation and the File Hills police force. From right across the country, we brought in first nation judges, prosecutors, you name it, to help us develop that road map and how we could get to where we wanted to be.

In 2022, we had the signing of the LOI, letter of intent, with Minister Mendicino, who came to Prince Albert. We've been working on building relationships with the federal government and the provincial governments coming together and the RCMP. I believe it's about building those relationships and trust and moving forward together. All parties agreed. We signed the LOI in 2022. Now we're just in the final stages of completing that feasibility study on how that policing is going to look. In March, we should have it finalized.

In terms of why we don't have.... That is the intent of giving our young people another opportunity. We have a lot of high school graduates who are graduating, but they wouldn't want to join the police force because of the past wrongs that have been done. You hear how our indigenous people are getting shot and people are getting away with it.

Those things are still there and are the reasons why people wouldn't want to join the police force. However, we're here and we want to change the story. We want our own police organization, the Prince Albert Grand Council, and have our young people join the police force and go into the justice system to try to change that story.

Another big problem I want to raise is the overincarceration of indigenous people in federal institutions. I visited one of our members in Kent Institution, where he wasn't properly represented. We want to make sure that our people don't get caught up in the system.

The whole training of people in indigenous policing, getting those opportunities, is very important.

• (1655)

I stand with our fellow presenters today. The essential service of policing is very important. It's a step that needs to happen in order for us to change the story. It is important.

Somewhere down the road, the appetite to have that jurisdiction over indigenous policing in the justice system within first nations communities is very important.

I'll leave it there.

Thank you. *Marsi cho.*

**The Chair:** Thank you. *Chi meegwetch.*

First off are the Conservatives and Billy for six minutes.

**Billy Morin:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests for coming in today.

I'm going to start with Mayor Herman.

As recently as last week, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council was on the news declaring a state of emergency in policing up in northern Saskatchewan. Were you part of that announcement or any of the partnerships with the chiefs at the tribal council?

• (1700)

**Lyle Herman:** No. At this time, we do not share a partnership, but I am working on building that relationship with my reserve at this time.

I was well aware of that declaration of a state of emergency. Chief Yellowback said a community has declared a state of emergency. We have looked into that option, but it clearly shows that even if we declare a state of emergency, help is still not coming.

**Billy Morin:** Do you have any faith that a timeline can be overcome when it comes to that particular state of emergency, or do you think it will be ignored?

**Lyle Herman:** Even if we declare it, I feel like it will be ignored.

As I said when I presented, we need to get to the root causes. Laws have to change here in Parliament so that these offenders in our community... They're beautiful communities. It's just a selective few who are causing these problems. We know that, and so do the police. I had one police officer swearing at me, saying this is BS. They know who's doing it, but the courts still let them out.

Unfortunately, one incident happened when citizens decided to take care of the problem themselves, but then the individual was thrown out. I don't want to see innocent citizens going to jail because the police are not there.

**Billy Morin:** Thank you, Mayor.

I'll go to Sheila North, building on what I asked Chief Yellowback earlier.

You're also from the north. I think you're from Treaty No. 5. Is that right?

**Sheila North:** Yes.

**Billy Morin:** This is a similar line of questioning.

There's this expectation of the Crown corporation Manitoba Hydro, Churchill and a whole bunch of economic activity in the north, but communities are still in crisis when it comes to policing, safety, addictions and poverty.

How fair is it that communities are still in those crises, but they're getting the same pressure to expand on the economic side?

**Sheila North:** That's a really good point.

For full disclosure, I'm also an adviser to the Arctic Gateway Group. One of the things I'm currently advising them is that they need to develop a protocol on how they work with the nations they're partnering with, governed by and owned by. It should be a standard now with every industry, whether it's economic or any other type of industry, that in Canada, they need a protocol on how they work with first nations. That includes respecting families, their safety and their basic human rights.

One protocol I was introduced to is in southern Ontario, in Shoal Lake. They have a protocol for people who come to work in the community. They have to sign a declaration that they will conduct themselves properly, as they would with their own families, for example, when they agree to come to work in the nation.

The reality is that our communities are very vulnerable, even right now, as you know. We need to develop better relationships with all of the first nations anybody works with.

**Billy Morin:** Thanks, Chief. I appreciate the solutions focus, as well as citing other jurisdictions that are doing some unique things.

Vice-Chief Tsannie, we've been discussing policing in indigenous communities. "Essential" is what we hear every single time, and declaring that "essential". We've also heard stories of remote communities. As remote as they are, there are still criminals and people who would want to commit wrongdoings and sell drugs. They're pretty sophisticated.

Do you feel like your northern communities are being targeted by people who are not from the community? They might not even be from northern Canada, but they're driving up, flying in or however they come in to systematically target your communities. There's a portrayal that if the RCMP is not there and if policing is inadequate, they could take advantage of that situation.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie:** I'm not really aware, or I haven't heard any stories, of outsiders coming in and selling alcohol and drugs in our communities, but certainly, there are people who are transporting alcohol and drugs into our communities. I'm assuming that since we're building some of these roads, those activities might come up, but hopefully we can have some control over that.

• (1705)

**Billy Morin:** Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** Ginette, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Hello, everyone.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us. I also want to thank them for their testimony.

Ms. North, your role as external advisor with the Winnipeg Police Service was created to provide it with an independent indigenous viewpoint.

What are the key lessons you have learned, in particular regarding accountability, community relations and trust, that could guide other police forces or a future federal framework?

[English]

**Sheila North:** Thank you very much, and thank you for the invitation to be here, Madam Lavack. I also want to acknowledge my support person here, former RCMP member Jacqueline Genaille.

Yes, I am working as an adviser to the Winnipeg police. One thing I'm noticing immediately is that there is a willingness with the police force to want to work with and understand the indigenous community. I think that's to the credit of the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls inquiry and others like it. There has been a lot of good coming out of that, in that aspect.

There's still a lot of work to do and a lot of room to grow. The training and the everyday setting of the tone from the top, in police agencies like the Winnipeg Police Service, are very important. The reality is that indigenous people are all over this country. They have always been all over this country. We're nomads. We move back and forth to the community. The relationships have to be there and have to be respected. That is definitely one thing that I continue to strive for and try to build connections with.

It is very important that all police forces understand, are trauma-informed and actually understand, the history of this country and what brought us to where we're all at right now. Governments, including provincial governments, can play a part in finding ways to give better accessibility to training and to recruitment of officers in not just first nations policing but in all the other municipal and national police forces as well.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Thank you.

If the federal government adopted legislation on indigenous police services tomorrow, what three priorities should be included in it so it has a real effect on safety and trust in the communities?

[English]

**Sheila North:** Paramount is the sovereignty. They need to develop their own systems. They're the ones who know their community the best. We've been police officers in our own communities, and peacekeepers in our own nations, for many generations, ever since we were around. I know that, because in our language we have a term for police: *simākanisak*. These people are very important. They need to have autonomy. The nations need to have autonomy on how they develop these police forces. They are slightly different from the mainstream, and that needs to be respected. Training of officers is also very important. Of course, the funding and the political will need to be there, because there seems to be a big, big gap.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Thank you.

My question may be a bit premature, but Ms. Anderson-Pyrz, who was on the last panel, talked about the possibility of implementing a "Red Dress" alert pilot project here in Winnipeg. The report will be presented tomorrow, and I am here in Winnipeg to participate in the presentation.

Are you familiar with this project?

Do you have any ideas about what effects it might have on the ground?

[English]

**Sheila North:** Yes, I've heard of it. I've seen a little bit of the work to study it and some of the discussions on implementing it. It is very important to have this resource available, because we know the history of what happens when women go missing. Sometimes cases are missed or cases are ignored. If we have a consistent system that treats every case equally, I think that will help.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Thank you, Ms. North.

Mr. Herman, what do you think are the mechanisms for coordination between municipalities, provinces and indigenous services that should be included in a federal law to improve safety?

• (1710)

[English]

**The Chair:** We just got a message from interpretation that the sound quality has disintegrated.

Try that one more time. Maybe lower the boom on your microphone.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Is it better now?

[English]

**The Chair:** No.

[Translation]

**Ginette Lavack:** Right.

[English]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, no. Let's move on.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor.

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you.

Ms. Lavack, I think we are thinking along the same lines, in any case, so I am going to be able to pick up on your question a bit.

Mr. Herman, I was troubled by your testimony. You talked about things that were discussed yesterday, in the community of Notre-Dame-du-Nord, and specifically by its mayor, Michel Vaillant. He talked about thefts and organized criminal activities and he is afraid things are getting out of control. Some people want to take justice into their own hands, because the police presence is not sufficiently robust. You said this had happened in your community.

Can you tell me about the consequences of that situation and ways it could have been averted?

[English]

**Lyle Herman:** A way it could have been avoided is that there should have been adequate policing, but there is not.

There was an incident in the United States where a veteran opened fire on three young men, and the law of the land in the U.S. pretty much protected him.

When somebody is breaking into your home and you have children, a family, at what time do you decide that it's life-threatening? It might lead to a break and enter, but at the same time, do they have a gun or a knife? If you saw them, are they going to hurt you or kill you? As an individual, when do you decide if your life is on the line?

There are laws in this land that seem to pretty much protect the criminals. Do not engage with them, and do not harm them, but call the police. How can you call the police, though, when there aren't enough police?

You can forget about security systems. If there's a break and enter at a home in my community and the alarm is going off, but at the same time, there's a domestic violence situation happening somewhere else, the police are going to triage the calls.

Adequate policing is needed, but at the same time, laws have to change. I believe that one of those laws should mean to protect yourself if you believe.... It's a grey area, but definitely you should be able to protect yourself, to bear arms, especially when you have children. You're not thinking about yourself. You're thinking about your children's safety at that moment.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Obviously, I can't support what you are arguing in that proposal, since I am afraid of the escalation it could lead to.

That aside, do you have any other proposals for legislative changes that you think it is important to make, particularly with regard to the powers of indigenous police services?

[English]

**Lyle Herman:** I believe it's not just indigenous policing, but it's policing in general. I'm hearing, and the members in the communi-

ties I represent are hearing, that laws have to change here, in Parliament. These repeat offenders need to have more severe or more harsh punishments. The crimes are being committed by a select few who are causing problems in our communities.

It's not just that, but there's also a large amount of meth. As mentioned earlier, it has become pretty cheap, and crime is going through the roof. People are breaking into homes even in daylight. I follow the news, and that's happening right across the country.

It's not just indigenous policing. If it does change, it needs to be the RCMP, and it needs to be a standard law.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** You alluded to a lax approach to enforcing the law.

How can we make sure the law is enforced fairly?

In many cases, what seems to prevent police from enforcing the law against first nations individuals is the fear of doing something racist. It can also be the opposite: when indigenous police enforce the law against non-indigenous persons.

Can you tell us about this?

To what extent does the law have to be enforced in situations like this, particularly where organized crime is involved?

• (1715)

[English]

**Lyle Herman:** I believe one of the simple solutions would be, as I mentioned, that the law could be changed. It's about inadequate policing. It's fundamental, right? As I said, my community is supposed to have 19 officers, and we are catering much more to outside communities. Criminals do see that. If you commit a break and enter, police are not going to show up, because there's simply a lack of policing. I speak about this in the 35 communities I represent in the north. About 130 officers are needed, just in the northern sector alone.

I'm coming here to address my community's concerns and those of the communities I represent, as the crime rate has gone through the roof. I'm addressing this to speak on behalf of all 35 communities that I represent, and not just the 35, but basically, us, the municipality and the communities, and the neighbouring communities of reserves as well.

Inadequate policing is primarily the issue. At the same time, I spoke about harsher punishments for repeat offenders, and that needs to go hand in hand. You might increase policing, but if these criminals keep getting away, what is the point of increasing policing as well?

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We now have the second round.

Jamie.

**Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much.

Mayor, I'll pick up where you left off when you were talking about these repeat offenders who continue to terrorize people. Of course, when you have an increase in crime, you have an increase in victims as well, and that's who you're advocating for as well. It's those victims who are continually being harassed or criminalized in your communities.

You mentioned inadequate policing. Yes, I think that's a perfect point. You said it just at the tail end of your comment. I was hoping that you could expand on it a little.

When the crime rate goes up, that's a problem too. We're getting more calls for service.

You have a combined issue with a lack of police officers at the moment, but the two.... We didn't get here by accident. There have been pieces of legislation passed federally that have led us to this exact point we're at now, where repeat offenders continue to get out and over again.

**Lyle Herman:** Yes. When I say "repeat offenders", I guess it's the severity of the crimes they're repeating. I have this one individual who racked up almost 30 charges. As I say this, it's a very select few causing the problems. When that one particular individual was flown out because a citizen took matters into his own hands and then the other one left the community for a few days, the crime rate of repeats dropped.

The RCMP officers know who it is and we as community members know, but at some point, how many charges do they have to rack up to get to there? I used to sleep well. Now, for every little sound I hear, I have to constantly get up to check it. Having an alarm system just isn't adequate. I had two houses that I watched over for the summer. I even had to sleep there. I had dogs there, which helped a bit. I'm saying that in each community we don't all have good neighbours who will take care of one another. We have busy lives and whatnot. That's what I mean.

I don't know what kind of law they have to break. These are the repeat offenders I'm talking about. Are B and Es not severe enough? I don't know.

**Jamie Schmale:** You also mentioned the fact that a lot of your communities are remote or isolated, and when there's a crisis, when seconds count and help is minutes or hours away, you mentioned the ability to reasonably protect their homes and themselves from any potential intruder, rather than what was mentioned in the news not too long ago in Toronto, where basically it was just leave your car keys at the door along with a glass of milk and some cookies for the criminals as they come in.

Maybe you can quickly expand on that. I might cut you off, because I have about a minute and I have to deal with some house-keeping.

• (1720)

**Lyle Herman:** Yes, there was a thought about that too. Of course, you never leave your belongings in the vehicle, but now criminals are breaking in anyway, so it's better to just leave your vehicle unlocked, so that when they open the door and look around, they'll see there's nothing there and will leave it alone.

We are hurting, because we have our vehicles smashed. Now they're drilling holes in our gas tanks. One individual stole a truck. Then the law says he was being charged, but it was for theft under \$5,000. It was a brand new truck that was stolen. How is that under \$5,000?

At this point I don't know what to do anymore. I have thought to myself that if I have to bear arms if somebody's trying to get into my home, then I'm going to do whatever I can. I don't want to, but I want to protect my own family.

**Jamie Schmale:** Thank you, Mayor. I have to jump in, not that I want to cut you off, but because I think we're getting into something.

I just want to talk about my notice of motion.

It's some quick housekeeping, witnesses. We should be in and out of here really quickly.

This has to do with the study we're on. I believe it meets the criteria, Chair. I'll read it quickly. Maybe we can have a vote and get back to the round of questioning. I move:

That, in relation to the committee's ongoing study on Indigenous Policing and Public Safety, and noting the release of the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report entitled "Overview of First Nations and Inuit police funding and spending" on Tuesday, November 25, 2025, the Parliamentary Budget Officer be invited to answer questions on Wednesday, November 26, 2025 for a minimum of one hour.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**Jamie Schmale:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Our next questioner is Jaime.

**Jaime Battiste (Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for their testimony. Being from a Mi'kmaq community, I know that difficult challenges brought the need for this study forward.

Chief North, I hear you loud and clear when you say that we need officers who speak our own languages to make our community safer. We've heard that from a lot of witnesses.

Mayor Herman, the discussion around how many break-ins have happened in these small communities without a significant police presence has been noted as well.

Chief Tsannie, I think you've expressed in real terms what we've been hearing when we're talking about some of the discussion points around RCMP enforcing our community, which is, "Why are they in our community if they don't want to work with us?"

The things we've heard thus far in this study as we come to a conclusion is that, when the RCMP are enforcing in the community, the community doesn't feel like the RCMP are working collaboratively with the leadership to get to solutions. Then, when we hear from indigenous police models, we hear that they're so underfunded that they're not able to provide the same services. We're stuck in this conundrum of how we create something with the indigenous police officers who we need enforcing in our communities with the capacity and resources that the RCMP have.

I'm wondering if there isn't a hybrid model that we could start looking at. How can our first nations community members police themselves with the capacity of the RCMP? I wonder if you have any solutions or recommendations that will help us when we make recommendations on the study on how to move forward to protect our communities.

Chief Tsannie, perhaps you could start and then maybe Sheila could comment.

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie:** I do want to share that community safety is very important. When we found out about the stabbings in James Smith, we were already in discussions with public safety way before those events. When those stabbings happened, we needed to come up with options other than policing. I know that in a lot of our communities, when things go wrong, we point to the police. We'll say that the RCMP, the police service, are the ones that aren't doing this or that. We've done that. We've knocked on those doors, and we've made those complaints.

If you guys recall, there was a guy in Halifax who dressed up as an RCMP officer in an RCMP vehicle and went on a shooting rampage. It didn't have a good outcome. After that, I think there was a hearing. I found out that there was a community safety initiative in Halifax. There's an association right across Canada where they talk about good practices. How do we make our communities safe? What are some of the best practices that other communities are doing that we can implement in some of our communities? I reached out to the organization. There's REACH Edmonton.

Recently we found out about funding that's available for communities. It's about prevention before things happen. That is equally as important as policing. We brought them together. There was no indigenous model showing how to work with our communities. We are developing that model. The problem now is funding. Again, it's funding. We have a model. It's there, but how can we implement something in our communities when there's no backup in terms of finding out how to do that? The idea is there; the prevention piece is there. When you break the law, you deal with policing, but prevention is equally as important as policing in our community.

I believe it's a hybrid. I believe we have solutions. We have a model in terms of how to address some of these challenges in our first nations communities, but we need some backup to roll it out and to introduce it to a lot of our indigenous communities.

• (1725)

**Jaime Battiste:** Sheila, do you want to chime in?

**The Chair:** Give a very quick response, please, as we're at the end.

**Sheila North:** Yes, absolutely.

I won't repeat everything that Vice-Chief Tsannie said, but I do agree that there should be an indigenous police force. We have enough retired former police members who could help in the development. The nations and the first nations leadership need to be involved, and even young people need to be involved in developing this system. Of course, that also means the funding needs to be there.

There's always competition for funding with the RCMP, the provincial police forces and even the safety officers, but we know that the safety officers, police and the style of indigenous policing that we have right now, like the TIPI we heard about earlier and first nations peacekeepers, work because they know our community. They know the languages and the struggles and they know the history.

Right now, there is a very targeted attack on first nations because we are vulnerable. We don't have the same security. We heard about airports not having the same security and about a massive amount of drugs coming into our nations. To me, this is foreign interference. This is definitely a description of that, because people are getting hurt. People are getting recruited, as we heard from Chief Yellowback earlier. People are being targeted through social media as well.

We are prime subjects for criminal organizations that are definitely being seen and felt in our communities, and that needs to stop with an increased presence of indigenous policing in our country.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Sébastien, it's over to you for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to ask a brief question before moving my motion, which has been tabled.

Chief Herman, if I understood your remarks correctly, you think that a police force, whether indigenous or non-indigenous, must enforce the law if a crime has been committed, regardless of where, whether on an indigenous reserve or not.

Is that what you think?

Is there legislation that would prevent an indigenous police force from enforcing the law outside a reserve right now or would prevent the RCMP or another non-indigenous police force from enforcing the law on indigenous land?

[*English*]

**Lyle Herman:** Yes, regardless of whether they're indigenous, laws need to be enforced, but not only laws that exist. Laws also need to change to enforce and strengthen certain laws and make sure justice is also being done. As we heard earlier, it's not just about the current laws that I talked about but other laws that do exist and need to be strengthened.

There was a question earlier about the hazy part of certain laws. As I said, how many times does someone break into homes, before...? Someone who has over 20 charges of breaking and entering is still living on the streets, and that's causing tens of thousands in damages.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you.

Following discussions with all parties, I am going to move a motion. Following a discussion with Mr. Battiste, in particular, I have taken the liberty of adding one little thing so the objective is clearly understood. I have added the word “recognized” before the words “Indigenous communities” and “Indigenous nations”.

The motion reads:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on issues related to recognized Indigenous communities that do not have a land base or reserve status, as well as those of recognized Indigenous nations that do not have a modern treaty; that the study examine how federal authorities can recognize and expedite processes of implementation; that the committee allocate at least four (4) meetings to this study; and that it report its findings and recommendations to the House.

As agreed, this would be the subject of the next study.

I think Mr. Battiste's concern is important. I don't want to examine the case of appropriators of indigenous identity or people who want to be recognized as indigenous in this study. However, there are many indigenous communities that do not have reserve status. Since the 1960s, communities have been able to achieve that status only in exceptional cases. We are concerned about this.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's in order.

Is there discussion from anyone?

Jaime, go ahead.

**Jaime Battiste:** I think there's been a little bit of discussion on this.

Regarding what I think Sébastien has stated, I would like to amend the motion on the fly to state that we look at the federally recognized indigenous communities, because there might be many communities out there that claim to be indigenous or claim that they don't have a land base. I want it to be very specific to the ones that are integral to his riding and his province and to really have that specific focus, especially on the first nations in his communities, because, as we know, there are now Inuit reserves or Métis reserves, and they have a different structure.

That would be my recommendation. There was some conversation about it. I hope that's okay.

**The Chair:** For clarity, you wanted to add “federally” before the word “recognized”, so it would be “federally recognized”.

Is that an acceptable friendly amendment?

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any further discussion?

**Jamie Schmale:** Are we voting on the amendment?

**The Chair:** Yes, it's a friendly amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Now we go to Bob, please.

You have up to five minutes.

**Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Thanks to the witnesses for coming today.

This question is for Joseph Tsannie.

A CBC article on October 15 has the headline, “Prince Albert Grand Council inches closer to creating independent police force”. You're obviously familiar with the article. It shows that things aren't going really well in their current form if you're having to pursue this other police force. The article refers to David Sanderson, the public safety implementation adviser for the Prince Albert Grand Council. The article says, “Some common concerns with how communities are currently policed by RCMP included long response times, a lack of cultural understanding, and a lack of presence in the community. Sanderson said people also feel there's simply not enough boots on the ground.” He said, “There are not enough police officers in our communities. They're under-resourced right now.” The article went on to say, “Meanwhile, some people's fears for their safety are growing.”

Vice-Chief Tsannie, it's clear the job isn't getting done in the community. Do you think it's a good use of those limited officers there and resources to go after law-abiding firearms owners and their hunting rifles?

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie:** In terms of hunting, where I come from, we're taught how to use firearms at a very young age. My son is 10 years old. I take him caribou hunting on the land.

In terms of the firearm situation and to use the understaffed police to go after those, I'm always open to any form of community safety, whatever form that may be, to make our community safe.

• (1735)

**Bob Zimmer:** The question was regarding if you're already lacking resources to deal with the criminals and crime that's in the community, do you think an additional task should be given to go after people like you who legally own your firearms and collect your firearms? Do you think that's a good use of resources?

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie:** I think since they're not responding, put them to work. Until we have our own indigenous police force, our own governance system, and how that's all going to work.... They're not responding. They're not there already. Put them to work, if you can, to make our community safe.

**Bob Zimmer:** Well, I hate that the one thing they're doing in the community is going after your firearms when you legally obtain them and own them.

My next question is for Mayor Herman.

We heard you say in your testimony that you've been down to five officers, and not necessarily officers who are even on duty in your community. You also said that criminal activity is happening in your community without consequences, and many times because of a lack of resources. I heard your frustration even when you said that if you have to take care of your own family, you're going to do that. That's a sad place to be when we have police forces that are supposed to protect us.

It's a similar question that I asked Vice-Chief Tsannie. Do you think it's a good use of limited police officers, who are having a tough time doing basic policing, to now have to go after law-abiding first nations and Inuit firearms owners who aren't the problem?

**Lyle Herman:** No, it's not. I don't believe it's a good idea. My family owns guns, but they're securely locked away and everything. Why should that affect them? We are obeying the law. We're using them for what they're intended. I believe they're right. Nobody should own handguns, actually. Why would you need to own them?

We had a shooting incident years ago, about a decade ago now, where an individual opened fire in a school. Where did that person get that gun? Who owned that gun? Was it even locked away? How did they obtain it? If we're looking at consequences, those who own the gun should have consequences for not locking it up correctly.

**Bob Zimmer:** You would agree that if the person got the firearm illegally and doesn't have a firearms licence, they shouldn't be able to own firearms. That's where the focus should be.

I have a follow-up question to that. Would you prefer that the resources go after criminals instead of going after your firearm and that particular group? I think the problem is the focus.

The last thing any community wants is.... We have already heard from many witnesses that basic crimes are going unaddressed in communities. Now they're going to get this task from the Minister of Public Safety saying that they now have to go after Inuit and first nations people who legally got their firearms and know how to use them, as Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie said. Now those police officers who are already maxed out are going to have to go after your firearms.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. That brings us to the end of the time. We're over the time.

We'll go to Brendan Hanley for five minutes.

**Brendan Hanley:** Thank you very much to the three of you for being here and for your testimony.

Ms. North, one of the items in your opening remarks that struck me was your comment that if you feel safe in your community then there's less crime. There's a kind of a perception of feeling safe, as well as actually being safe.

I wonder if you can describe briefly what the elements are to be able to feel safe in a community.

**Sheila North:** That's right. I think part of it is indigenous people and first nations particularly that I know of seeing themselves in the forces and in the solutions, and hearing their solutions being utilized to address and tackle the crime and the injustices that they see in their nations. Yes, part of it is what these members are trying to point out about misguided tasks. I know what they're trying to do, but I think the biggest misguided task is not being able to fund the nations properly.

First nations are forced to use part of their funds every year to support the role of police officers and safety officers in their communities. Those are already limited funds, as you probably know. They're also forced to fund some of it and that's completely not fair. None of it is fair at the moment because this issue is causing people's loss of life, and loss of peace, safety and the feeling of safety. That can only come from more presence of officers themselves, their solutions and better-equipped communities to deal with the growing problem that you've heard about already.

● (1740)

**Brendan Hanley:** Vice-Chief Tsannie, you really described the whole spectrum of, I would say, a holistic approach to community safety. I was really impressed with your remarks.

I'm curious as to what either motivated you or enabled you to get involved so young. You described getting involved at the age of 18 in leadership and community safety.

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie:** I spoke earlier about opportunities for our young people in our northern communities. We are still dealing with TB outbreaks in our northern communities. Since COVID hit, we told people to stay indoors. There were 15 or 16 people in a three-bedroom home with one bathroom.

Our kids are looking for opportunities. We started a pilot training program to give those opportunities to our people. We got them an elder support pilot for mentorship support. We looked after their accommodations. If they wanted to go home to eat traditional food, we allowed for that.

The whole training of policing needs to accommodate our people, who come from isolated northern communities, to make them feel welcome, make sure they're not intimidated when they go there and make sure the supports are there to get our people into the law enforcement or the justice system in a good way.

It's about giving opportunities and changing the story. If we continue to stay status quo, we're not giving opportunities to our indigenous communities and things are just going to escalate to other things. It's about opening those doors.

Why not? It's been 152 years since the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have been working in our communities. Why haven't our first nations stepped forward and taken that opportunity and that responsibility into their own hands? Why not encourage our students to get into law enforcement?

It's about changing the story. If things are not getting better—if your yard is not being cleaned the way you want—then you do it. That's the opportunity we have.

We all want a safe community. We all want safe provinces. We all want a safe Canada.

**Brendan Hanley:** I would like to squeeze in one more question.

You also mentioned opportunities for sports and recreation. What are you seeing in terms of those opportunities in the communities, and how can we help to increase those opportunities for sports and recreation?

**The Chair:** Give a 30-second answer, please.

**Vice-Chief Joseph Tsannie:** With regard to opportunities, school programs are very important—more funding for sports and

recreation opportunities at the school level during the education opportunities. There is also transportation access. There's the high cost of transportation. Let's say you're sending a hockey team from one of our northern communities to a major centre down south. That's probably \$1,500 per ticket. How can you send a hockey team when you don't have roads? What about training? If you go out, you can't visit your home because you can't afford to.

The high unemployment rate in our communities is tough for families. The high cost of living in the north—the food, the training, the gas, etc.... Those are all barriers that we need to find solutions for.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for all of your testimony. It was very much appreciated.

I'm looking around to get consensus to adjourn the meeting.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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