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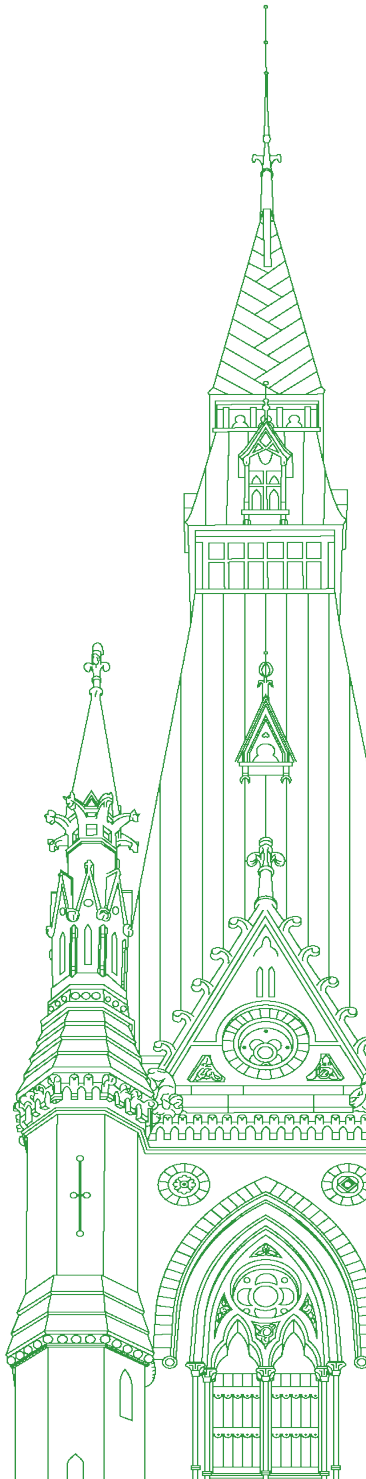

Chair: Terry Sheehan

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Wednesday, October 22, 2025

● (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair (Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number six 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 resuming its study of indigenous policing and public safety.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for our first panel. Both are on video conference.

If you need to raise your hand using the "raise hand" function, make sure you have your approved headset on or just raise your hand if you need to get our attention.

Please be mindful of your devices that are used for the interpreters. The earpiece should be on the little sticker. There are tips on how to avoid feedback. Please review these so it's not hard on our interpreters.

In our first panel we have, from the Blood Tribe Police Service, Grant Buckskin, chief of police, by video conference. From Service de police de Pikogan, we have Annick Wylde, director.

You will each have five minutes to speak, and then we will jump into our six-minute rounds of questions and answers.

Without further ado, I will turn it over to the people online.

Grant Buckskin (Chief of Police, Blood Tribe Police Service): Good afternoon. Thank you very much.

Oki.

I am the [*Witness spoke in Blackfoot*]. I am a proud member of the Blood Tribe and the chief of police for the Blood Tribe Police Service. As stated earlier, my English name is Grant Buckskin.

I would like to thank the committee for providing the opportunity to make a short statement. I hope our concerns are heard and addressed.

I have been in first nations policing for 35 years and have not only served my home community but have also had the honour to serve in other first nations communities within Alberta and Manitoba. Over the years, the challenges of first nations policing have always remained the same and have been discussed at length. They include chronic underfunding, funding model failures, recruitment and retention issues, systemic racism and bias, a lack of trust and accountability and an absence of essential police service legislation.

The lack of federal legislation recognizing indigenous policing as an essential service means indigenous police forces do not have the same rights or protections as other forces. This also inhibits and limits our negotiating power during funding talks.

It goes without saying that these are valid challenges and issues that have been documented and discussed at length. When the conversation turns to essential service designation for first nations policing, there is hesitation and a refusal to recognize our services as equal to our non-first nations police services.

I ask you these questions: As a first nations police service, are we not considered as important? Are we not deserving of the same designation? Would we face the same challenges if we were a newly formed police service in a small municipality?

There are reports that have been released that state the challenges. These are the very challenges I have addressed, yet there is very little to address these issues. Other police chiefs and associations have been advocating for this essential service designation for years, yet it remains out of our reach. I have not been a part of these essential service discussions, but history has shown there is a bias towards many issues that are related to first nations. I suspect this is the case in this pursuit.

I'm speaking today with the hope that we can reach an understanding on the importance of this designation for first nations policing. Again, I'm going to ask how many more committees, reports and meetings will be held to discuss these same issues repeatedly without any resolution. We know the issues. We know the challenges—challenges that have been placed in front of us from day one.

In closing, I hope our participation and the words we will share today will be heard and a plan of action developed. We are still here, we have thrived despite the challenges mentioned and we will continue to provide adequate, culturally appropriate policing to our respective communities. We only ask that we be treated fairly and in the same manner as our non-first nations counterparts and police services.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Grant.

We'll go to our next speaker, please.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde (Director, Service de police de Pikogan): Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, thank you for having me here today.

We are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinabe nation, my nation, which has inhabited, protected and honoured these lands since time immemorial. I would also like to thank the interpreters and the committee staff.

[*Witness spoke in indigenous language*]

My name is Annick Wylde, and I have been the director of the Service de police Pikogan for five years. I'm also a police officer with 37 years of service, and I'm vice-president of the Association des directeurs de police des Premières Nations et Inuit du Québec. I'm speaking today as a field worker who experiences the real-life impacts of funding and governance decisions on a daily basis.

First, I will talk about funding stability. Stable funding is the key to everything. Working on short-term agreements means living in constant uncertainty. We can't plan for hiring, we can't guarantee training, and we can't replace equipment on time. A five-year framework agreement, indexed to the cost of living and reviewable mid-term, would finally give us the predictability we need to effectively manage our services.

When we can plan our spending, we group purchases together, we get better prices and, most importantly, we protect our officers, our police officers.

Let me be clear: Predictability costs less than urgency.

In my service, this stability would keep us from having to choose between two bad options: operating with expired equipment or postponing patrols. My officers once wore out-of-date bulletproof vests because of unforeseeable procurement times and budgets that left us with no other choice. No other police force in Quebec would accept that.

Another issue that weakens us is the actuarial catch-up of our pension plans. Recent salary increases were necessary, but without funding to adjust the plans, we're passing the bill on to small organizations like mine. Our pension funds are not on par with those of provincial or municipal police forces. The result is that our police officers invest as much and take as much risk as others, but they don't get the same retirement security.

If we want to recruit people and retain the next generation, there must be real parity, even when it comes to pension plans. It's about fairness, but it's also about sustainability. A dedicated fund for actuarial catch-up would ensure that fairness without weakening our operations.

I'm going to talk to you about training. I was part of the last cohort trained at the indigenous police academy. I went to the Mashteuiatsh indigenous police academy before training was centralized at the École nationale de police du Québec, or ENPQ, in Nicolet. It was a locally and culturally adapted model that I strongly believe in.

Today, when I send a police officer for advanced training or professional development at the ENPQ, I lose a resource on the ground and have to pay overtime to the remaining staff to fill that gap. For a small service like mine, these costs add up quickly.

Having said that, we have trainers in our ranks from indigenous police forces who are fully certified by the ENPQ. For example, an Opitciwan instructor trained in Nicolet could come and give my team the same training, but they can't do so without getting an administrative exemption from the ENPQ. This exemption, which takes weeks to obtain, unnecessarily slows down our police officers' professional development and complicates management for training that's otherwise equivalent.

● (1640)

We're therefore asking for a full exemption from the requirement that our police officers be trained exclusively by the École nationale de police du Québec. Our services should be able to organize training locally with qualified instructors from other indigenous police forces based on recognized and equivalent standards. This is already the case, for example, for a fully certified Opitciwan instructor, who cannot teach elsewhere without administrative authorization.

Providing this training at home is faster, more economical—

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We've arrived at the five minutes. You'll have plenty of time to provide more input during the time for questions and answers.

We will go to our first six-minute round of questions and answers.

We're going to start with Mr. Morin.

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

Thank you to our two witnesses for sharing with us today.

Oki, Chief Buckskin. We met a number of weeks ago at the opening of the Chief Crop Eared Wolf justice centre. Given that I have family ties to Kainai, although I am from Treaty 6, I was very proud to see that happen.

Kainai has had its own police forces for a long time. We've heard a consistent theme in this study thus far that solutions really rely on the communities. Kainai has, for a long time, proven through its self-investments and risk-taking that it is serious when it comes to protecting its community.

We know the struggles when it comes to funding and recognition, but I'm hoping you can elaborate on some of the successes and lessons learned for other first nations, Métis or Inuit communities that want to start their own police forces. Hopefully, in the future, there will be better supports for them.

What are some of the things you would have done differently and what are some of the successes? Can you give a short summary of the best lessons that Kainai has learned since establishing the Blood Tribe Police Service that other nations can learn from?

● (1645)

Grant Buckskin: I take especially great pride in the fact that....

Let me go back a little bit. I began my career here back in the early nineties. At that time, we already knew we were facing a lot of challenges, but one thing that always remained consistent and which we always took pride in was that we were familiar with the community and the people here. I mean, these people are not just community members. They're also family. They're friends. I grew up here. Over the course of my career, I've had to deal with families and friends in some not-so-good situations, but one thing that's always been constant is how we've conducted ourselves—respecting the culture, how we grew up, and what we were taught by our elders and the knowledge-keepers.

As our service progressed and we began to expand, we kept that, even to today. My biggest source of pride is the fact that we have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that we remain a culturally appropriate police service. We've taken into account our customs. We've taken parts out of Kainayssini, the elder declaration. We've respected that by including it and making it part of our mission statement and our values. That's what we're proud of the most. We've always faced these challenges, but we've always thrived. We've found ways to survive. On top of the fact that, we're building this culturally appropriate service. We're also especially proud of the fact that, despite all these challenges....

It's not just first nations people. My police service is not strictly first nations. I have non-native officers here. We've always it made a point from day one to tell them, “You're going to learn about the culture. We're not going to force it down your throat, but there will come a time when during the course of your duties, you'll go into some places where we will need you to be respectful.” We help them. I can honestly say that now, any of my officers, whether they're first nations or not, or community members or not, are very respectful to our people.

One of the big things was that, okay, now it's trauma-informed policing. Well, not only with the Blood Tribe Police Service but with any other first nations police service, particularly first nations officers, we've lived it. We know it. Trauma-informed policing is nothing new to first nations police.

Billy Morin: Thanks, Chief.

Maybe I can ask a follow-up question that builds on some of the strengths you mentioned and the tough conflict of interest aspects unique to indigenous communities, with families and things of that nature. A tough situation Kainai has faced in the last decade is the influx of street drugs like fentanyl. I recall even hearing about funerals being backed up for three weeks over there. It's a very tough situation for the nation to deal with.

Canada is going through a similar thing, of course. It doesn't affect just first nations. It's in Lethbridge, Edmonton, Calgary and Toronto, and on the west coast and the east coast. We're never satisfied until there are zero deaths when it comes to hard drugs, but I do understand that things have become a little bit better through several initiatives and things like tough love. As we say in our communities, tough love is still love.

What has Kainai done to address the drug crisis over the last number of years?

● (1650)

The Chair: Excuse me, Grant. That brings us to the end of the six minutes, but perhaps there will be an opportunity to answer that through another questioner somewhere down the line.

That brings us to Jaime for six minutes, please.

Jaime Battiste (Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, both, for your service and your commitment to justice.

I didn't get a chance to hear much about both of your police forces, how many people you represent, how many police do you have working.

How important is it to have your communities policed by members of that community or of the people who are part of that nation, in terms of the work that you do every day? I'd like Just one minute from each of you, if I could.

Chief Buckskin, you can start.

Grant Buckskin: Okay. It's a very fine line, especially if you're policing your home community. As I said, over the course of my career, I've had to deal with family members, uncles, aunts and cousins, and for the most part they've been very respectful. Of course, there's going to be that period where they're angry with you. It's going to last two or three weeks, but you meet them at some family function, and they'll apologize and you move on from it.

One of the toughest things, and I have to say this right off the bat because it just happened recently.... We had an event here a couple of days ago. The acting sergeant had to become the incident commander for the situation, which involved a death. It was a close family member. You have situations like that. I personally have gone to a sudden death where it's been a close cousin who I grew up with. You have to investigate it because putting all that aside, you're still a police officer and you still have your duties to perform.

On the flip side, you go into a call somewhere and you have somebody who's agitated. They're angry and under the influence of drugs or alcohol, particularly alcohol in this instance. You walk in and they recognize you. They know it's you. They know you're from the same community. They're more apt to talk to you. You're familiar with these people. You know what they're like, so you give them that extra two or three minutes to get angry or whatever, but five minutes later, you're walking out of the house with them in handcuffs, and they're laughing and joking.

I've also gone to complaints with other non-nation members. When they walk in, the person doesn't recognize them, doesn't know who they are, so automatically, that level of engagement does not recede. It does not decrease. It stays up there.

Jaime Battiste: Can I intervene on that? Would you say that someone being familiar with a member of their nation and being able to speak the language helps de-escalate situations on reserve when talking about policing?

Grant Buckskin: Absolutely. If people recognize you and you're able to speak the language, that has a significant effect on the whole situation.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you.

I'm going to Director Wylde.

If you could keep that thought going, does having members of your nation who can speak your language help with community policing?

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: Yes, it really helps.

When I'm in a situation where the person is a member of my community, I speak to them in my language. Things move faster, because the relationship of trust is already there. It's easier, faster and more effective. I then become a reference point for that person.

● (1655)

[*English*]

Jaime Battiste: Director Wylde, you talked a little about the indigenous police academy in your area. Can you tell me more about the indigenous police academies that are out there? How many are you aware of in Canada that are actually directed towards policing and indigenous people?

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: The Mashteuiatsh indigenous police academy no longer exists. The 22 indigenous police forces in Quebec now go to the École nationale de police du Québec, or ENPQ. However, some don't go there anymore because there's a language issue for them. There's no translation from French to English. That's why many people no longer attend the ENPQ. I don't know the exact percentage, but I know that anglophone indigenous police forces are having trouble obtaining documents that are translated into English. That's a problem. There's also a shortage of anglophone trainers. Some training is not automatically offered in English at the ENPQ.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire now has the floor for six minutes.

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

Good afternoon, Director Wylde.

I'm particularly proud to see you. The last time we met was, I believe, when the first shovel went into the ground at the new Pikogan police station for the Abitibiwinni first nation. I have to say that I'm very proud of you. I'd also like to congratulate you on your presentation, which was very clear.

I'd like to ask you a first question.

As a woman chief of indigenous police, do you feel that this can inspire the new generation, especially the young women in your community, who could become chief of police and make the commitment to safety and to the community?

Annick Wylde: Yes, I do. Several young women have come to see me. Students from CEGEPs have also come to see me. I've had discussions not only with female students, but also with male students. Because I've been a female police officer for 37 years, I care a lot about that.

I'm proud to be a police officer. I gave a speech at the 50th anniversary of the École nationale de police du Québec, and it opened some doors. Yes, I would like to have even more students, but it's not always easy to recruit. However, I can tell you that we're working hard on it.

Sébastien Lemire: You seem to have run out of time to finish your opening remarks, which were very clear.

Would you like to add anything?

Annick Wylde: Yes. I had a few more points to make. May I continue?

Sébastien Lemire: I'm offering you the time to do that.

Annick Wylde: Okay.

I was talking about training earlier. I support the establishment of a bilingual indigenous academy in Quebec. This would make it possible to structure a regional approach, while meeting the department's training standards for certification. I advocate for the establishment of a first nations police academy that would be adapted to cultural safety. It's not easy for a student to leave their community and leave everything behind. They may already have a family. It's therefore important that they be surrounded by their own people and with qualified indigenous trainers.

I also wanted to say a few words about the 911 service, which represents a major operational issue. Without a dedicated 911 dispatch centre, after each call, our officers still have to hand-draft or computer-draft the call cards. This adds to the work and delays, sometimes putting lives at risk. At 3 a.m., in the absence of a functioning 911 network and without radio support, a patrol officer can often receive incomplete information. These are preventable risks. Our communities must be connected to the 911 network, with clear protocols and shared funding between governments. This is not about creating a parallel system, but about aligning our services with Quebec's common standards to ensure a quick, safe and equitable response.

After 37 years of service, I firmly believe that stable funding, pension plan parity, adapted and recognized training, as well as full access to 911 service, are the four pillars that would enable our police forces to fully play their essential service role.

● (1700)

Sébastien Lemire: *Meegwetch*.

That's crystal clear.

On another note, in Quebec, the Viens commission served as a catalyst to improve relations between police officers and indigenous communities. In your opinion, what meaningful progress has been made since 2019 in terms of cultural training, accountability mechanisms and access to police services adapted to first nations realities, particularly at your police service in Pikogan?

Annick Wylde: At the community station where I worked, it was positive in that regard. However, a number of things were not respected. I can't tell you specifically which of the Viens commission's calls to action were not met. Even though I didn't write them down, I can tell you that not all of them were respected by the government. However, others were, and it was a success.

Sébastien Lemire: There seems to be a serious inability to recognize that indigenous policing is an essential service. There are ongoing discussions on that. This is very important, particularly in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. There's also talk of establishing an Anishinabe regional indigenous police force.

How could designating indigenous police services as an essential service make a real difference for you?

Annick Wylde: First, indigenous police services need to be designated an essential service, and it needs to be enshrined in law.

Right now, it's considered merely an initiative. It's critical that indigenous policing be seen that way. The 22 indigenous police forces in Quebec could benefit from this designation. It should already have been done.

Sébastien Lemire: We also need more indigenous police services.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

That's six minutes. Thank you.

Next is the second round.

This will be five minutes for Jamie from the Conservatives.

Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses on this very important study as we try to figure out a path forward with indigenous policing. I think all sides are extremely interested in finding a path forward to making this a reality one day, hopefully sooner rather than later.

I have a question for both witnesses. Chief Buckskin, I'll start with you, if I could.

You listed some of the challenges through previous questions. I apologize if I missed it, but perhaps I can get an idea of what types of crimes you are seeing most often. Are you seeing a small number of people repeating and the justice system failing with the bail system we currently have sending repeat offenders back out so quickly?

Could you give us a kind of picture of what you're dealing with?

I'll get the director to respond to the same question, and then I have some follow-up questions.

Grant Buckskin: Absolutely.

What we deal with out here on a regular basis is what you would refer to as crimes against persons. We have a lot of violent crime and we have a lot of aggravated assault. The recidivism rate is quite high. Our bail and our catch and release programs are ineffective. We go out, catch a bad guy, put him in jail and he's back out. You're sitting there looking at his criminal record and his past and thinking that perhaps this guy should not be out, yet he's right back out. I don't have an answer to how to fix it, nor would I even suggest that I know where to start.

Our justice system needs some overhauling. That could lead us right back, especially on the first nations side.... We have all these social problems. We are all educated here and we all know, particularly in first nations communities, where all these social problems began. We're still dealing with it. These are the residual effects of the colonization that has gone on in the past.

I totally understand that as a police officer and I understand that as a first nations person. There has to be change done, whether it's through the justice system or through how we're conducting our bail hearings. The whole process itself needs to be addressed and changed.

● (1705)

Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Chief.

Director, it's the same question for you, please.

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: Can you repeat your question, please?

[*English*]

Jamie Schmale: Yes, absolutely. It was more about getting a picture of what you and your team are dealing with on a daily basis. From what we've been hearing from previous witnesses, there are, usually, a small number of people creating more crime. They get arrested, are out on bail and are immediately back in the community, doing the same thing. I just want to get a picture of whether you're dealing with the exact same thing that we heard in previous testimony.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds to condense that.

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: We certainly have major social problems as well.

It surely stems from residential schools. This is nothing new. I think the justice system needs to be overhauled, as Mr. Buckskin said. The situation is the same for us in Quebec.

I, too, come across family members in my work. We arrest them, the justice system releases them and they return to the community. Then we're the ones who have to deal with those individuals and manage those situations. We must always be consulted first in the event of major changes, and it's about listening.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ginette, you have five minutes, please.

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): Thank you both for your testimony today, for being here with us and sharing your important information. I have a question, again, for each of you.

Chief Buckskin, I believe that recently the Blood Tribe Police Service received $6.8 million in federal funding through the first nations and Inuit policing facilities program for the construction of a new detachment. I understand that both the Province of Alberta and the Blood Tribe also contributed to this important project, showing that these kinds of partnerships, when everyone is involved at the table and contributing, really demonstrate how we can progress together and move things forward. From your perspective, what can we do to build on this kind of collaboration to ensure that long-term and sustainable support is there for indigenous policing?

Grant Buckskin: To me, the answer is quite obvious. That would be that first nations receive essential services designation. Getting that puts us on an equitable...and it's fair. It's all of the issues that we spoke of earlier, particularly recruiting and retention. Since I was appointed as the chief of police, I have lost probably 10 officers to other police services. For each one, when we do an exit interview, it always comes down to the same thing: We do not have a robust pension plan.

We have tried to enter into pension plans within Alberta and federally, but we've been met with nothing but roadblocks. The main point in all these arguments is the funding model, because it's a program. They're scared to take us on because they're afraid that, as with any program, the funding could stop. It could be shut down, and they would lose their share as well. For us, the biggest one, and the one that's going to improve everything for us as a first nations police service is that essential police services designation.

● (1710)

Ginette Lavack: Thank you very much for that answer.

My next question is for Annick Wylde.

[*Translation*]

You recently received support from the Quebec government to launch a homelessness and mental health intervention model. This partnership between police and psychosocial workers is somewhat inspired by the approach used in Val-d'Or.

Could you tell us a little more about this approach with the community? What are you hoping to achieve with this model?

Annick Wylde: I hope we'll have good collaboration to help the community. It will be easier for our police officers when things escalate during their response. It will also be faster when we have problems with individuals affected by the Act respecting the protection of persons whose mental state presents a danger to themselves or others. Having a responder there will help police officers on the ground.

Ginette Lavack: Has the project already begun?

Annick Wylde: It will be starting soon.

Ginette Lavack: In February, police officers were still waiting to hire psychosocial intervention resources.

Is that still an issue, or have certain recruitment targets been met?

Annick Wylde: It's quite a challenge to have a resource from the community to establish a relationship of trust.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Now we'll go to Monsieur Lemire for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Director Wylde, earlier this week, we heard from Captain Robert Durant of the Val-d'Or police. I found it interesting to hear him talk about the joint forces and collaborating with your police service. He told us that you had to make difficult choices because of funding, if I understood correctly.

Can you explain to us how the lack of funding has had an impact on the services you provide on the ground as part of this joint police force?

Annick Wylde: I wasn't there when the funding for the community station was cut. I was repatriated here before that, so it didn't affect me.

Sébastien Lemire: Does the Pikogan community help the Val-d'Or police? How does it work on the ground?

At the same time, I'd like to know if you ever help indigenous people in distress in urban areas, such as Amos or Val-d'Or.

Annick Wylde: Yes, I have. You know, when you speak a person's language, you become a reference point for them. It's easier to speak in Anishinabe with a homelessness worker who speaks that language. That builds a relationship of trust.

Sébastien Lemire: Is the collaboration with white police officers going well? Can you tell me about your experience with other police officers? How does that improve practices or the knowledge of first nations realities on the ground?

● (1715)

Annick Wylde: Non-indigenous police officers work directly with us. Several have left and are now with the Sûreté du Québec. They have an easier time dealing with first nations.

I think it's a good mix and a good exchange.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

I want to take the last few seconds to congratulate you again and to thank you for your commitment. *Chi-meegwetch*.

Annick Wylde: *Meegwetch*.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have Philip for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you for appearing here today, and thank you for your public service.

We've heard much about the importance of police service in indigenous communities being deemed essential. I've heard you both talk about insufficient funds. My question is along the lines of the insufficient funds, acknowledging that you are the chief and the director.

When you measure insufficient funding, where do those shortcomings appear? Are they boots on the ground from the community? Are they in bricks and mortar or lack of equipment?

Talk to us in a little more detail about that, please.

Grant Buckskin: For us, it is everything. We're talking about recruiting, manpower and resources. It's very hard, and I'm going to go back to a remark that I read which Chief Jerel Swamp made recently. How can we approach a young person within the community to join the police service when we can't offer him a proper pension, benefits and everything else associated with that side of the job? We can't offer them that.

They're interested in policing, so they look at Lethbridge or Calgary. They're offered all this there, so where do you think that young person is going to go? They're not going to come and work for the Blood Tribe Police Service. They're going to go to a municipal service that offers all these other benefits that I cannot. That right there is the beginning of the effect on resources. We can't find proper staffing.

I'm running with 37 people right now, and this is the highest number we've had for resource manpower-wise. If we want to get into the first nations policing program terms and conditions, some of them have been lifted, so now we're able to create specialized units that non-first nations services take for granted, such as canine and general investigation services. It's a whole combination of everything.

I don't want to take up too much time. I'll give my counterpart an opportunity to speak.

Philip Earle: Go ahead, Director Wylde.

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: As I said, stable funding is the key to everything. The important thing is also to be recognized as an essential service. As I explained, in our case, we need equipment in all spheres. Stable funding, pensions and training are all important.

Of course, I can plan for recruitment, but I can't always guarantee training and equipment replacement on time, because of funding. That's always a challenge.

For example, if an agreement were to end tomorrow morning, what would I be able to tell my staff? I once had to swear someone in as a special constable because the agreement had not yet been signed.

The important things are stable funding and being recognized as an essential service.

● (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Bob for five minutes, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Zimmer.

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of you for coming today.

This is our study on first nations and Inuit policing, as you know.

For Chief Grant Buckskin, there was an article on October 27, 2022 entitled, “Police chiefs urge Ottawa not to rely on forces to oversee gun buyback program”. The article states:

> The Liberals plan a mandatory buyback program to offer compensation to affected owners and businesses.
>
> Regina Police Chief Evan Bray, appearing at a House of Commons committee on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, says the buyback will be an administrative process involving a massive amount of work.

> Bray told MPs that police are already overstretched and lack the resources to administer the buyback program.

Chief, countless fellow police chiefs are pushing back against the Liberal firearm confiscation plan. We're studying lack of accessibility, and you even mentioned in your statement about it being hard to recruit officers and hang onto them. Regarding those limited recruits and officers you have, do you think it's a good use of already understaffed first nation and Inuit police officers to go after law-abiding first nations and Inuit firearms owners?

Grant Buckskin: Absolutely not. That would be a complete waste of resources. We're stretched thin already, and I am not going to put the community at risk by removing resources from our front line to oversee something like that. No, it would be a complete waste of resources.

Bob Zimmer: Thanks, Chief.

My second question is for Director Annick Wylde.

I'll refer to the Auditor General's report on what we're studying today. On page 15, section 3.54, the report states:

> We found that over the past 5 years, the RCMP had not fully staffed the community tripartite agreement positions that it received funding for from the program. This means that some communities with community tripartite agreements were not being served by the agreed-on number of officers to enhance the policing services provided through provincial or territorial police service agreements.

Again, it goes to what I asked the chief previously, yet the Liberal government still wants to use those finite police resources, limited police resources, to target law-abiding firearms owners.

Director Wylde, with countless fellow police chiefs pushing back against the Liberal firearm confiscation and ban, do you support assigning already overworked first nations and Inuit police officers to go after law-abiding first nations and Inuit firearms owners when they are not the problem?

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: I'm sorry, but I didn't quite understand the question. It would have to be interpreted into French for me to understand it.

[*English*]

Bob Zimmer: Was it not translated? Is translation on, Chair? I'm at three and a half minutes, and I just....

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Is it working?

[*English*]

They say it's good. Who's having a problem?

Bob Zimmer: The witness didn't hear the question.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I wasn't paying attention, but, no, the interpretation wasn't working.

It's working now, but the interpretation wasn't working while he was asking his question.

[*English*]

I'm sorry, but I was—

● (1725)

Bob Zimmer: Should I repeat that question? I'm at three minutes—

The Chair: Repeat that question, and if we can't hear it, then yes, you'll still have your time.

Annick Wylde: I'm sorry about that.

Bob Zimmer: There's no problem. I don't blame you.

My second question is for you.

I'm quoting from the Auditor General's report, section 3.54, on the first nations and Inuit policing program:

> We found that over the past 5 years, the RCMP had not fully staffed the community tripartite agreement positions that it received funding for from the program. This means that some communities with community tripartite agreements were not being served by the agreed-on number of officers to enhance the policing services provided through provincial or territorial police service agreements.

I'll even go on to 3.55:

> In the last 3 years, as program funding for officers had increased, the RCMP had not been able to fill these additional positions, leading to a greater difference between the number of officer positions funded and the number filled.

We heard from the other chief, and I'm sure it's the same for you. It's difficult to recruit officers in your police force.

With that understanding, and with countless other police chiefs pushing back against the Liberal firearms confiscation and ban, do you support assigning already understaffed first nations and Inuit police officers to go after law-abiding first nations and Inuit firearms owners when they clearly are not the problem?

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: I know that the RCMP respects the number of officers agreed to in the tripartite agreement, as do I.

However, I didn't understand the end of the last question because of the interpretation. I'm sorry.

[*English*]

Bob Zimmer: I can repeat it.

I'll maybe talk a little bit slower for the interpreters to keep up.

The Chair: We're running out of time.

I'm just suggesting this, but if you need more time, you may want to put it in writing.

Bob Zimmer: No. I'd like to ask it now.

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: Okay.

[*English*]

Bob Zimmer: We've had two cracks at it. I'll just go slower.

The Chair: You can ask the question, but I think we're going to have to get a response in writing, unless it's a very brief answer.

Jamie Schmale: I think it was more of a technical issue, not that he ran out of time.

The Chair: I've added the time.

Let's just expedite it.

Go ahead.

Bob Zimmer: Director Annick Wylde, if this works, I can go a little slower.

With countless fellow police chiefs pushing back against the firearm confiscation ban, do you support assigning already understaffed first nations and Inuit police officers to go after law-abiding first nations and Inuit firearms owners when they aren't the problem?

Basically, what I'm asking is why police officers would take up valuable time to go after law-abiding firearms owners instead of criminals.

[*Translation*]

Annick Wylde: I think it's a safety issue. This is important. The police need to be able to exert some pressure around that. It's a safety issue for the officers on the ground, and it's important.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end.

Jaime.

Jaime Battiste: Mr. Chair, in order to have a really good understanding of issues, we're going to be inviting a lot of witnesses here, and every one of them is probably going to have a different policing service and a different situation. There have been some conversations between the Conservatives, the Bloc and me.

It would be great if we could get our witnesses to give us some more information so that we can ask really good questions. Perhaps the clerk could get a little bit of baseline information about the witnesses, especially around when their policing was established, how many communities they service, how large of an area, and how many of their police officers are indigenous.

Basically it's just gathering that information so that we have an understanding of each community's unique policing service to help us ask the appropriate questions.

● (1730)

The Chair: That's fair. We'll see that it happens.

That brings us to the end.

I want to thank our witnesses very much.

We have a hand up.

Chief, you can provide the information that Jaime has asked for in writing.

Go ahead, Chief Grant.

Grant Buckskin: In response to the last question about the information that was required, if you visit our website at bloodtribepolice.com, we upload all our annual reports. That has the bulk of what the question asked for regarding land-based population calls for service. It's all there.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The clerk will work with you and future witnesses to bring that information forward. I really appreciate that very much.

Thank you very much.

Chi-meegwetch.

I'm going to suspend while we get ready for our next witnesses.

● (1730)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1737)

The Chair: Welcome back as we go to the second round.

Today we have, from House of Wolf and Associates Inc., Georgina Nagano, founder and chief executive officer, and Una Gair, chief operations officer.

By video conference we have Cheryl Gervais, chief of police, Treaty Three Police Service.

I will start with the House of Wolf and Associates Inc., for five minutes, please.

Georgina Nagano (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, House of Wolf and Associates Inc.): Good evening, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for inviting us to present before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to provide testimony as a witness for your study on indigenous policing and public safety.

As I begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation that I am presenting on.

My name is Gina Nagano, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in from the Wolf Clan. I was born in Dawson City, Yukon; however, I made my home in Whitehorse.

In 1985, I joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police when I was 19 years old and served 21 years, policing in many northern indigenous communities in Canada. In 2006, I retired as a sergeant here in Ottawa as my last posting in national aboriginal policing. After my short retirement from the RCMP, I worked for the Department of Justice for seven years and then worked for Correctional Service Canada for one year.

I founded House of Wolf and Associates, an indigenous-owned community safety firm based in the Yukon. We work with nations across the north and western Canada to rebuild safety on our own terms.

The Chair: Excuse me, Georgina. Could you slow down a little bit for the interpretation, just so they can keep up.

Thank you.

Georgina Nagano: Okay. I'm trying to get through my five minutes.

I'd like to introduce Una Gair, my chief operations officer and a long-time ally of this work we do with nations.

The first nations and Inuit policing policy was designed to fund dedicated, culturally responsive policing work. It does not. If it did, I wouldn't be here. Millions of dollars remain unspent and 61 funded positions were never filled.

I want to highlight what the Auditor General's official said during the committee meeting on October 8. The same recommendations that were made and accepted by Public Safety Canada and the RCMP in 2014 were not acted on, by their most recent review in 2024. Over 10 years, it was the same findings. It's a policy still from 1996, and there are still no metrics and no accountability.

What we have in place is a revolving door and performative, self-congratulatory reporting by the RCMP in community tripartite agreements based on questionable data analysis. Meanwhile, communities are still waiting for the safety they were promised.

MP Bob Zimmer, to your astute point, during the October 8 committee meeting on this study, the RCMP can't convince enough people to work for them, let alone to move to remote communities where they have no roots. As a former recruiting officer for the RCMP, please don't get me started on the barriers to indigenous recruitment.

In reality, the FNIPP dollars meant for indigenous safety get reallocated to overtime and operational costs, to flying members in and out on rotation to cover leave, or to filling desperately needed detachment positions in general policing. It's happening everywhere. The result is no continuity, no relationships and no trust. Communities sign for dedicated officers, but what they get is a revolving door and another broken promise.

Please let me be clear. This is not a failure of the hard-working and good members providing policing services. It's structural. It is deeply reminiscent of the collective history between indigenous people and Canada's policing services.

Nations are doing what nations do best: They started working around these systems. They built to meet their own needs, just like they've done since time immemorial.

I'm sure MP Hanley, who has been an advocate for this work in the north, and former chief Doris Bill of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, who has testified before this committee, have already told you about Kwanlin Dün's trained community safety officers who patrol daily, check on elders, keep tabs on vulnerable people and defuse conflict before it becomes a crisis. In Teslin, two elder women, the “deadly aunties”, make sure everyone gets home safely, keep eyes on the community and support families in conflict.

Selkirk, Carcross/Tagish, Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Taku River Tlingit and Daylu Dena first nations have all built versions of community-led safety teams. Other nations are developing theirs now. They're unarmed, prevention first, high trust, accountable to their governments and people, and they cost a fraction of what reactive policing costs.

These are not pilots; they work. Early data backs that up. In Kwanlin Dün, emergency calls dropped sharply once the community safety officers began regular patrols, from dozens each month to only a handful. Citizens report feeling safer and more willing to reach out to community safety officers earlier before a situation turns into a crisis. We've seen the same pattern in Teslin and Selkirk. There have been fewer police calls, fewer violent incidents, an increased quality of actionable data on serious criminal matters for the RCMP and far more community trust.

This is what the Auditor General described as missing in the federal program. It's real engagement, real outcomes and funding that actually reaches the people it's meant to serve.

To quote you, MP Billy Morin, as you reminded this committee, give it “back to the communities. That's where the solutions lie.” You're right. Nations have already shown what works.

Our recommendations are straightforward and they come directly from the communities we've served. These are the same ones outlined in our white paper.

First, recognize indigenous-led safety programs as essential services in law alongside policing, but not beneath it.

Second, fund directly with multi-year, needs-based agreements.

Third, respect data sovereignty. Nations must have access to their own safety and wellness data, including disaggregated universal crime reporting, to track what's working and hold systems accountable.

● (1740)

Four, support capacity. Don't control it. Invest in indigenous-led training, mentorship and evaluation so that nations can keep leading.

The Chair: Georgina, I'm going to get you to stop there because we're a little bit over, but the rest of your testimony will come out during questions, I would imagine.

We'll now go to Cheryl Gervais for five minutes, please.

● (1745)

Cheryl Gervais (Chief of Police, Treaty Three Police Service): *Bonjour*. Good evening.

Honourable members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to speak today. It's an honour to join the study on indigenous policing and public safety in my capacity as chief of police for Treaty Three Police Service.

My perspective is shaped by lived experience. I am a first nation woman from Iskatewizaagegan No. 39 First Nation, the daughter of residential and day school survivors, a mother, a community member and a long-standing member of Treaty Three Police Service. I've stepped into every role with the purpose of serving as a role model for our youth and amplifying the voices of those we serve, both within my organization and in the communities we serve. Our officers work every day to uphold public safety while building trust and cultural connection, yet our communities continue to face significant inequities directly tied to chronic underfunding and outdated program structures.

When we talk about systemic racism in the justice system, we must begin by naming it. It is not only present in institutions but in the frameworks that guide them. Indigenous police services have operated for decades under a model that was never designed for our realities. Even today in our funding negotiations we've been asked to conform to systems that fail to reflect our unique needs. This is systemic racism in practice, when structures that are built without us are still imposed on us.

The 2024 Auditor General's report and numerous reviews have echoed what we've long known, that funding remains inequitable, partnerships with communities are lacking and programs have failed to evolve in step with indigenous self-determination. These challenges extend beyond policing. Every day our officers respond to issues rooted in the same systemic underfunding—housing, health care, infrastructure and education. Public safety cannot be separated from these broader conditions. When indigenous policing is underfunded, entire communities feel the impact.

Still, our service remains proactive. We've implemented innovative programs, advanced mental health priorities through the Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario and introduced body-worn cameras, but this progress is still built on one-time funding, without sustained investment in training, staffing or infrastructure. No other police service in Canada is asked to compromise so consistently on safety, wellness and sustainability.

On the barriers to indigenous recruitment, we must acknowledge our history. Treaty Three Police Service was formed to reclaim our relationship with policing, yet 20 years later, we continue to struggle to meet the needs of our communities. I saw that first-hand when we lost Wabaseemoong due to those very gaps. However, there are bright spots. Our community cadet program and our 22 for You campaign engage youth in each of our communities, helping them to see policing not as an outside force but as a service rooted in their own values and identities.

This study asks how governments can work collaboratively with indigenous nations to advance safety. The answer begins with indigenous leadership. We must ask who is missing from the table. The principle of "nothing for us without us", championed by the families of MMIWG, must guide this work.

At Treaty Three Police Service, we've lived this through our community-informed operational review with PwC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, defining what safety truly means from the community's perspective. Those closest to the community are best positioned to define safety and how to achieve it. Canada must work in true partnership with first nations, grounded in respect for jurisdiction, self-determination and the right to equitable public safety.

In closing, indigenous police services are essential. They deserve the same recognition, resources and respect as any other service in our country.

Meegwetch. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: *Meegwetch*.

Eric, you have six minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Chief Gervais, for being here virtually. It's good to see you again.

We've spoken in the past about some of the prescriptive restrictions put on funding that Treaty Three Police and other first nations police services receive. I'm wondering if you can speak more to that. How do those restrictions, the sort of framework that the government provides, actually impact your ability to do your job in the way you want to and as effectively as you want to, when those funds are coming already predetermined with regard to where they're going?

● (1750)

Cheryl Gervais: To that, I will say that, certainly, growing up within the organization.... I started with the service in 2003 and grew up in the organization with the goal of retiring in the corner office as chief of police. Throughout my career as an officer, I certainly saw the beauty of indigenous policing, and as I've grown up in the organization—and more so within my role as chief of police, sitting at the funding table now, pulling up my chair at a certain table within my role as chief of police—I've also seen the challenges and disparities within indigenous policing.

Your question certainly raises that when it comes to the framework, the FNIPP, the model that we work under. We are very much used to doing more with less, which again brings strength and partnerships in our community. However, it also brings challenges when it comes to the mental health of my staff because of the geography we cover, the types of calls for service that we respond to and the lack of supports and even resources in community when we're trying to support our communities.

Again, in our funding negotiations, the expectation for us to use models or systems that are not built for us, that don't take the cultural responsiveness piece into consideration, the expectations that our communities have for Treaty Three Police to provide effective service and equitable service to them in terms of public safety and their feeling safe in our communities.... We are failing. It's been over 20 years of saying, “I'm sorry. We're short. We're trying.” I'm tired of saying it. They're tired of hearing it. Now you see these efforts with Treaty Three Police Service in collaboration with the UCCM Anishnaabe Police Service and the Anishinabek Police Service to stand united and together pushing back on those frameworks, such as the FNIPP, and having that unified voice amongst police leaders in advocating for change.

I think the previous guest spoke to the lack of specialty units under the program, which has now been lifted, which is great. It's a step in the right direction. However, I still struggle with the recruitment. How am I supposed to fill those positions?

Eric Melillo: Thank you very much for that very wholesome response. I really appreciate that.

As you mentioned, you and all the Treaty Three Police are doing incredible work with very limited resources, so I appreciate all that you do to keep people across our territory safe.

Obviously, we've seen right across Canada, in municipalities, first nations and everywhere in between, a crime wave over the last few years. Bail reform has led to a lot of violent repeat offenders being released. There's been an uptick in gang activity, drugs and the smuggling of illegal items, all things that have been happening right across Canada. Certainly, northwestern Ontario, Treaty 3 territory, is no different.

I'm curious as to whether you can speak to that challenge and how that's playing out across Treaty 3 communities. You mentioned the specialized units and the retention and, obviously, addressing these issues. Specialized units are often necessary, whether it's for gangs, drugs or human trafficking.

I know I've packed a lot into that, but I'm wondering if you could speak to the need for specialized units and that retention piece.

● (1755)

Cheryl Gervais: Absolutely.

When you talk about bail reform and incidents involving drugs and things of that nature, obviously, our service is very well versed in responding to high-crime severity calls for service. When it comes to specialty units, we do have positions in place, but again, one-time funding, not sustainable funding, and again, pulled from our front line, which is challenging for us when our communities expect visibility and presence in our community. That definitely came through in our operational review. In the conversations we're having in the community, the expectation is much different on an indigenous police service than a municipal police service. Our communities actually want to see a police cruiser every day.

When it comes to fulfilling these positions in our street crime unit and our drug units, we have a civilian offender management unit of one person covering our 22 communities. Those are the challenges put on us in trying to address the issues around drugs.

Eric Melillo: That's probably my time.

Thank you, Chief.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We'll now go to Brendan for six minutes, please.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

Georgina, I'm going to concentrate on you.

First of all, you didn't get to finish your five minutes. Are there some essentials you wanted to convey quickly? I do have a few other questions for you, but if there are any key points in terms of your recommendations, go ahead, and of course we'll take the written one as well.

Georgina Nagano: Thank you, MP Hanley.

I've worked inside the RCMP and alongside nations for over four decades. That's 40 years. I've aged myself. I know what policing can and can't do. Enforcement alone will never build safety in our indigenous communities. Safety is built through relationships, prevention and accountability to one another. We cannot police our way out of trauma.

Brendan Hanley: Thank you. That's excellent to hear.

You talk about data sovereignty. It reminds me of one story you related. It was about the impact when, after a year or so of the CSO program being instituted at Kwanlin Dün, the number of calls to police went down quite dramatically. Can you briefly recount that?

Georgina Nagano: Yes.

When we started doing the community safety work in Kwanlin Dün First Nation, one of the things we did look at was the data, which is the number of police calls over the past year. In 2015, the former chief, Doris Bill, had asked us how many calls to police services we had to that community. It was a community of 300 homes, with 500 individuals living there and access to 24-7 policing, 365 days a year, all the resources, three FNIPP positions. There were 1,076 calls, which meant every person made two phone calls to the police every day. There were high rates of crime: domestic assault, sexual violence, break and enters, etc.

We started working with the community and the community safety officer program, and the next year former Chief Bill said, “Gina, can you ask the RCMP how many calls of services we got to the community in 2016 after we started working there?” Inspector Thompson said, “It's 666.” I said, “No, Archie. I need it for the whole year.” He said, “It's 666 calls.” We dropped the number of police calls by 40% in one year.

Brendan Hanley: Have you been able to access ongoing data to establish whether that has continued? How are you measuring success?

Georgina Nagano: I'm going to ask my colleague to answer that question. She has done the analysis side of it.

Una Gair (Chief Operations Officer, House of Wolf and Associates Inc.): It is a consistent challenge for nations to access uniform crime reporting data, which is disaggregated, anonymized data from the RCMP around criminal offences within their communities, as well as outcomes of criminal offences in the communities. It is an ongoing issue that hamstrings nations' attempts to evaluate their own programs and the impacts of their programs. This has been an ongoing challenge, and one we have raised time and time again at multiple tables.

● (1800)

Brendan Hanley: Thanks. That's great to know.

I think a lot of the success is more on the anecdotal side and, even so, quite dramatic certainly from many of the stories that we hear.

Gina, you've been very direct in your recommendations, and that's appreciated. You haven't talked much about your own work with House of Wolf and how you work with communities. Maybe you could briefly describe the community survey that you carry out and how that might influence the development, or not, of a CSO program and how that might vary with different communities.

Georgina Nagano: Thank you, MP Hanley.

Again, I'm going to ask my colleague to answer that.

Una Gair: We engage in a process called community-based participatory research, which is a mixed-method process of engaging with the community, making sure that we cover about 20% of the people who live within that community and engaging them in various forms. We'll do small group engagements followed by in-depth, one-to-one qualitative interviews to continue exploring themes. In small communities it can often be hard to raise things publicly, but when they work with us privately, a lot of things might come out.

We do that specifically so that we can help them identify stable dynamic patterns of risk and maladapted behaviour within their communities and design programs within that community.

We're probably best known for community safety officers and guardians, but it is a web of programs that nations generally action simultaneously to start upriver of the challenges that you're seeing and the challenges that we're all trying to address. The CSOs are one component.

One of the pieces I really want to highlight, which I know is peripherally related to your question, MP Hanley, so, again, thank you for raising it, is that the current FNIPP has a binary. Nations have an option of engaging in a CTA, a community tripartite agreement, with the RCMP or police of jurisdiction when deeming their own police force, and that is a very restrictive binary. For a lot of nations that are geographically remote and have small communities that might not have the economic means to enact their own police force, it's impossible. It's a de facto single option.

Georgina Nagano: I think—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

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

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Nagano and Ms. Gair, and congratulations on your initiative.

I saw on your website that your organization was awarded the 2021 Arctic Inspiration Prize. I also noticed that, at the time, Dr. Henley collaborated on the initiative that obviously made a difference and had a significant impact on your community.

In your opinion, are the current federal, provincial and territorial funding mechanisms sufficient to support indigenous-led community safety programs and services like yours?

Can you give us some examples of things that should be happening but aren't because there's not enough funding?

Lastly, can you explain how targeted support could strengthen self-determination initiatives in policing?

[*English*]

Georgina Nagano: Funding mechanisms are challenging. The first nations governments that we work with fund the community safety officer programs up front. Part of it is that it becomes an ownership; they own the program. The federal or territorial government doesn't, and the success of the program is that they own the program up front.

However, they have to dive into their own funding dollars to fund these programs, which makes it very challenging, so support for funding is ongoing. The gaps that we find, the funding gaps to ensure these programs continue...there is no sustainable funding. That's why we're here: to try to acknowledge that we do need sustainable funding for the program that really works.

If there were another stream.... There are three streams, and one stream is the RCMP doing the enforcement. You have the first nations and Inuit policing program that does the enforcement. We don't have the stream that allows for the community to take care of itself under a community safety officer program or a community safety guardian program where they can actually work from a holistic approach.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: On your website, you also establish a link between the impact of western funding on economic development and the impact of that same funding on communities.

I'd like to hear more about that, because I think it's important to understand that targeted funding doesn't always produce the desired results and sometimes leads to inequities that have consequences, particularly in indigenous communities.

[*English*]

Georgina Nagano: One of the things I've done is I've worked on my master's in community economic development. A lot of the background I have is in economic development as well, after leaving the police force. I came up with a diagram called the “indigenous economic gap.” Here we are, where we have trauma and crisis in our indigenous community based on colonization and so on, and on the other side we have the economy, where some communities are wealthy. The problem is that our people are too unhealthy to come over to the other side.

The Kwanlin Dün community 20 years later has made it to the other side. The entire community is thriving in economic prosperity. What you need at the end of the day is indigenous economic sustainability so that the community can starting carrying its own. They're ready. It's like this: If you had trauma, and we put safety as the foundation, then you can start taking the steps to go to school, get a job, etc., and be part of the community. That's what we have done for the entire community to shift to economic prosperity.

This community of Kwanlin Dün is functioning. They're one of the wealthiest communities we have in Yukon now. People come home to work in their community. They thrive in their community. They have the lowest social assistance—they used to have the highest—in Yukon. They're probably down to zero. They have the highest employment rate. Their people are coming home to work for their own government.

Access to education, training and all of that comes together by placing safety as the foundation. That's what we do. You can thrive as an autonomous, self-sustainable community.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have just one minute or so.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: That's perfect.

Ms. Nagano, your program is similar to what we do a lot in Val-d'Or with joint policing. I would like to know more about collaboration with the RCMP.

Are there ongoing challenges?

Is trust developing?

What concrete measures do you think the federal government could put in place to improve collaboration while respecting the autonomy of indigenous communities?

[*English*]

Georgina Nagano: I'd ask my colleague to answer that, please.

Una Gair: There's a long-standing history between indigenous people and the RCMP or policing as agents of the Crown and the state. It's a very fractured relationship. Kwanlin Dün is an interesting case example. It's the longest-standing program that we were involved in. It's probably why we keep talking about it. They also commissioned an evaluation report that I would encourage you to read. It's not ours to share, but I believe they would be happy to talk about the success of that program.

One of the challenges was that even in a well-policed and well-resourced area, people were not contacting the police. People were not accessing those justice services. There was a fundamental fear around what would happen when the RCMP would show up. The beauty of this intermediary program....

Again, it's very different in every community. We have two elders in Teslin who are doing this work. They work as a bridge between formal justice and the community as advocates and guides and witnesses to how they're treated, to what happens after and to the aftercare that wraps around them. I think it's—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us a little bit over the time.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask the witness to send the committee the evaluation report she mentioned.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

MP Morin, you have five minutes, please.

Billy Morin: Georgina, again, you've certainly highlighted the importance of how communities need to police themselves. You've highlighted some of the work you've done in the Yukon and with community safety officers. You named two women as “deadly aunties”. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on the uniqueness of how two “deadly aunties” are keeping their communities safe in the Yukon.

● (1810)

Georgina Nagano: It's amazing. They're two matriarchal sisters who are over the age of 65. They applied for the program as community safety officers. What we've brought back to that community is we've revitalized their traditional justice and their traditional ways based on their culture, their values and their clan system so the youth and the people are accountable to somebody. It's revitalizing those traditional ways, and everybody in the community respects that. They respect the “deadly aunties.” If they say, “You have to go home,” they go home. The crime rates dropped because they became the eyes and ears of the community. They know before the police know what's going on in the community. They don't have to carry firearms to find that out. They don't go out into harm's way. It's out of trust. It's out of respect.

The big word is “trust.” They have the trust of the community. They don't rotate in and out. They stay in those communities, and they know everybody. The success of that with the “deadly aunties” is that they're matriarchal; they're respected, and they're revitalizing their traditional laws and their traditional ways. They've been there for almost four years now.

Billy Morin: I love hearing solutions that are modern but also take in the context of traditions and how family values are important to the nations.

I'm solutions-focused, so I'm going to try to get through this very quickly.

One thing the current government has done well is they've worked with first nations to implement 10-year grant agreements in ISC. In order to qualify for a 10-year grant agreement, you get 10 years of sustained funding and a road map of 10 years, rather than the one or two years of contribution agreements that most first nations have. In order to get one, you have to have a financial administration law, FAL, and you have to be First Nations Financial Management Board certified.

I think of a solution when it comes to policing rather than Public Safety's FNIPP that we have, which is woefully poorly regulated right now. There's a correlation with, maybe, a future program like a 10-year grant program. I believe, as a Conservative, in protecting the Canadian taxpayer when it comes to taking a risk on each other. The risk is that first nations and the FAL have to have FAL to up their capacity to be responsible, but they also have less stringent rules on how they spend their money. It's up to them on that 10-year grant agreement. When it comes to policing, I see something similar maybe planting a seed here. Maybe, when it comes to policing, you could have a community safety law in order to qualify for a 10-year policing agreement one day in the future.

What would you put in a community safety law for indigenous communities in a framework? What do you think that would look like?

Una Gair: Every nation is going to be really different. There's no way to give exact recommendations around this because, for example, in the case of Teslin Tlingit society, they are matriarchal, so women hold positions of responsibility around social norms and law, which is how that program worked really well. I think I would want to remove the idea that having to be around policing, wellness and justice is a lot more than policing. You're starting at the end of the river. I would suggest that we revisit how we view justice and access to justice to be a lot more than crime and criminality and responding to crime and criminality.

Billy Morin: I'm going to finish up with a comment, Chair.

I do appreciate your answer, because I think this could be a correlation with other social services that worked. This has worked with other first nations with the government. Here, I don't think there's one size that fits all, but there are principles amongst indigenous communities that traverse this whole country. I think about restorative justice and how it's less about policing and more about how you mentioned where to start when it comes to the river.

Thank you for that answer.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Jaime for five minutes, please.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank MP Morin for taking my question about the “deadly aunties”. I was interested in hearing more about that, so I'm going to continue with that line of questioning. What's the collaboration like between the community safety officers and the RCMP in the region? Do you find that it's a working partnership, or is it failing?

● (1815)

Georgina Nagano: I'm here to be honest, and they're failing. I say that because I'm a former police officer, and I used to work in an FNIPP position, and it never worked then. I'm going back to 1985. You can keep funding the police and the RCMP on the road we're going, and we'll be back here in another 100 years.

What we need to do is look at a healthier collaboration and say, “Yes, we do need the police. Yes, we do need the community safety officer program. Yes, we do need this.” Right now it's a struggle. It's almost like it's us versus them, and I know that. I was in the RCMP, and it was always us versus them. The threat is that we're allocated, say, $1.5 million to do community safety work. What happens in the Yukon is that the police don't get $1.5 million to hire more police.

I policed in Whitehorse, Yukon when I was 19 years old. There were two of us policing the whole Whitehorse area with a population of 19,000. It hasn't changed.

As I said, I'm here to be honest with you, and that program is failing. Allocate it to the communities like the autonomous indigenous policing services of my colleague here. That's where they go, not to the RCMP. At the end of the day, with enforcement work, we can't police our way out of trauma. In terms of collaboration, it is a challenge.

I wish the RCMP would step up. We were told specifically by the commanding officer in the Yukon, “They will not work with us.” Why? The program is successful. We're healing our people, and what does it cost the government? We haven't had any dollars yet. It's a very good question. Why it's a challenge is beyond me.

I think my colleague has something to say.

Una Gair: It's a challenging time across the board, probably in the public service and I'm guessing for the RCMP. I know they were quite impacted by a white paper in March talking about the future of contracted policing. That probably colours some of the conversations and collaboration we have.

One of the best descriptors I can give you is that, when a nation enacts its own safety programming, a year down the road they were targeting domestic files and K files. We want to see the impact of what we've done. Have we lowered these? Are we collecting more of them now or are we reducing the dark figure?

We have had such challenges with nations requesting that data from the RCMP, which they don't own. They report up to CCJS every month. It's a 30-second PROS poll, and they won't share it with that nation. Again, it's disaggregated and anonymized. It's a series of numbers to a 9,000 level that just provides contextual detail around what was detected and then the outcomes of said detection and/or the relationship between the accused and the victim.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you for that.

I have to think that, from the testimony we're hearing today, when communities have someone familiar to them, someone who is a part of that nation, it helps de-escalate the situation a great deal. Right now the RCMP doesn't have that approach that community safety officers have.

Do you think we need a different approach or maybe a hybrid model? We've seen tribal policing being used in the States, where people are able to have sheriffs in their community or tribal groups. Is this a model we need? Do we need to think outside the current context of flexible options and find something different for first nations policing?

Georgina Nagano: Absolutely, and one of the things I said is that there is a place for the police in the enforcement role. We absolutely need that, but I am also saying that there is a place for indigenous communities.

Enforcement was to enforce. It was to take away the children. That's what happened, and we haven't changed that. We have not, since the inception of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, so we need something different for our communities, absolutely. We have to think outside the box. I always say that we have to think outside the circle. We must do that. Change is not going to happen if we don't change here.

Jaime Battiste: This is the last question I have.

Is there collaboration between community safety officers all across Canada so that we can look at best practices and models that are really working well? By doing that we could say, “This is where we put the money”, instead of putting the money into the RCMP, which seems not to be working as well as we would like in many of our first nations communities.

● (1820)

The Chair: Give a very quick answer.

Georgina Nagano: Yes, if you could put the money there, I'll guarantee that it will work, and I'll guarantee that will drop the crime stats in any community.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're going to Mr. Lemire for two and half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Nagano and Ms. Gair, we know so much more about collaborative policing now thanks to you.

What training do you think police officers need?

What public safety protocols and strategies should be in place to support cultural awareness among police officers and orient them to your realities?

Such training should be of interest to provincial and federal authorities that dictate budgets. Do you have any recommendations for us?

[*English*]

Una Gair: We recently partnered with Yukon University. We donated our time over the last year to develop the first micro-accredited program for community safety officers as an induction training. We would be happy to share information around that with the committee.

The question you're asking is difficult because every community is so different. I can speak to the communities that we've worked with and with the receptive RCMP detachments, because they do exist. There are some of them that are trying really hard and doing great work. One of the things that we've done is an orientation for new members that's very specific to that community. That might be going and having tea with a couple of elders or participating following a harvest and doing these things as a passport to that community before they actually take on their patrolling duties.

It's about building a relationship, knowing each other as humans and building trust. It would be difficult to say this is what you need across the country beyond mental health literacy and trauma-informed care, the things that should be standard in any first responder training.

Georgina Nagano: I want to add that in the Yukon, out of 14 first nations, we are working on our fifth community where there is the community safety guardian program.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: In your opinion, what are the most effective strategies when it comes to community-based prevention and culturally appropriate approaches to dealing with drugs and alcohol in communities?

[*English*]

Georgina Nagano: That's a really good question.

My background being in drug enforcement, undercover police officer, etc., we work with the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Unit, SCAN. SCAN is a territorial legislated enforcement that comes together. We work with them on bootlegging and drug trafficking issues. We come up collaboratively with innovative ideas within the community with the community safety officers to eliminate the drug trafficking that is happening in the community. It works.

We're also looking at developing and designing this community safety app—if you want to fund that. We do. It works. We're allowing the communities to be proactive. They are standing up and giving us the information that we can work with, the police and SCAN. We also created a community tips line. People are calling in anonymously and confidentially to provide us with information.

Have we tackled the hard drugs and the crime in the communities? Yes.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Now we'll go to Mr. Schmale for five minutes, please.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair.

It's been great testimony here today. Thank you very much to the witnesses, both online and in person.

I want to bring up something you mentioned, Georgina, in your opening statement.

You were talking about the indigenous policing program itself and the fact that it hasn't really been updated since 1996. A lot has changed in that time. That is baffling to me, as Mr. Morin just mentioned a few minutes ago talking about the program funding and how you work within those constraints, but we're also talking about a program that hasn't seen many updates since 1996. There was an Auditor General report in 2014 that outlined some changes. Really, the fundamentals of the program have not really undergone any substantial changes based on the realities of today.

● (1825)

Georgina Nagano: Yes.

Did you want to answer?

Una Gair: Sure.

Yes, they haven't. A lot has changed in the last 15 to 20 years: the toxic drug crisis, the impacts of COVID on mental health and well-being, the economic recession, which is also going to be highly implicated in social determinants of health and increasing crime rates. There is quite a bit that's changed in terms of, for example, bail laws, the capacity for supervision at the federal and territorial or provincial levels. It's become significantly more complicated, which is why again we're really confused by the Auditor General's report of the unspent millions and where they actually went given that they're certainly not hitting the ground or impacting the communities that need it.

Jamie Schmale: Before I get to my next question, does our friend from Treaty 3 want to comment?

Cheryl Gervais: I can certainly comment on that.

I think I spoke earlier of the change in allowing funding for specialty units. That was only two years ago, so it has very much stayed the same over the last few decades. Again, we're continuing to advocate for changes to meet our needs, to be informed by communities and services that serve the indigenous communities. You are right, though. It's unfortunate that, in this day and age, we're still educating, and people are still surprised that frameworks such as the FNIPP have been stagnant.

Jamie Schmale: It's really shocking to learn that, despite the fact that everything has changed so much. In 1991, it was created, and in 1996, the Internet was just getting started, and now we're dealing with all sorts of new things.

I like what I'm hearing on all sides here, talking about the funding going directly to the indigenous communities themselves. They know how best to deal with a lot of these issues in the community. I like the talk about standardized compensation, getting away from more program funding, allowing police services to dive into pensions and to offer benefits that might help with retention of officers so that you don't have this revolving....

How do you see this big change happening? The RCMP was mentioned earlier. If we want to move more away from, say, the RCMP and more toward community policing, how do we change that whole formula so that it works, given the fact that there are differences within first nations communities all across the country?

Una Gair: Given that the money is already allocated through FNIPP, I would suggest that you remove the gatekeeping of Public Safety Canada and that you remove the RCMP as administrators of the program. I would suggest that you convene a round table, and bring in the Assembly of First Nations, the Council of Yukon First Nations and other associations from across the country, and co-develop a model for both access and reporting.

Jamie Schmale: I think I agree. I think the money is there. I don't think we need to create any new money flow. We just need to better spend what we're actually allocating through the budgetary process. I would agree.Thank you for that.

Does Treaty 3 want to comment before I jump into my next question?

Cheryl Gervais: As a service that works closely with our communities, I am certainly in support of empowering our communities to take care of their own safety. Our role is obviously enforcement, but as an indigenous service, we strive to be culturally responsive and to have that enhanced connection and trust, given the historical realities of our relationship.

For example, in one of our communities, Lac La Croix, they have enacted inherent law, which includes community safety officer positions, but that's where we hit the wall. How do we support them as a police service when we're struggling financially? How do we support them to fund that training with their own funding, just to sustain that program at their community level?

The Chair: That brings us to your five minutes, Jamie.

Jamie Schmale: I thought you said seven.

The Chair: No. That's a nice try, though.

Witnesses, thank you very much for your excellent testimony today from all of you.

Chi-meegwetch. Thank you.

● (1830)

Cheryl Gervais: Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

The Chair: Folks, this brings us to the end. It's 6:30.

Do I have agreement to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.