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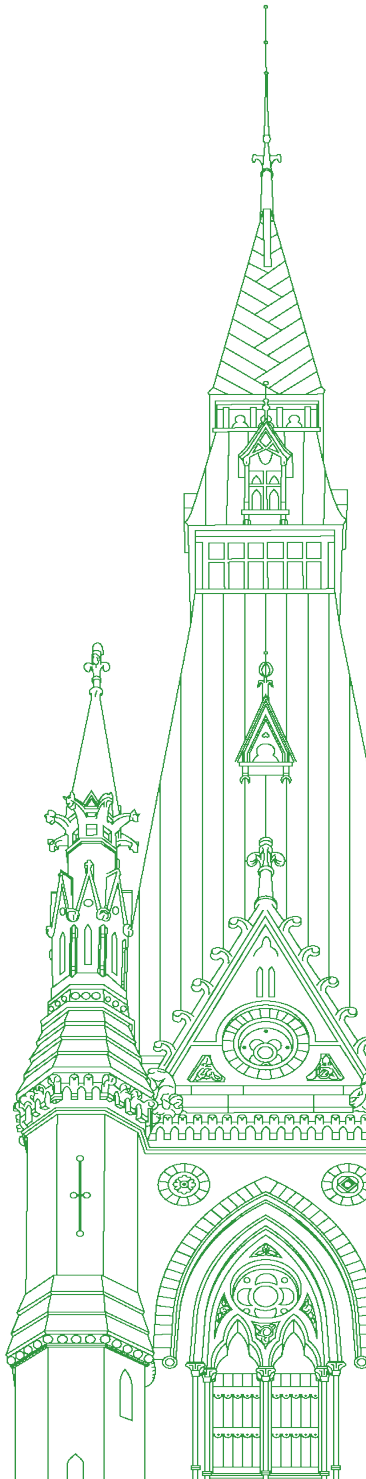

Chair: Terry Sheehan

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

● (1630)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon. Welcome to meeting number eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. 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 would like to welcome our witnesses, some online, some in person, for our first panel. We have representatives from the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Ontario Provincial Police.

You will each have five minutes to give an opening statement, followed by a few questions.

I guess since the OPP is here in person, we can start with them.

Will you be making the presentation, or will your colleague online be doing that?

Inspector Marcel Beaudin (Indigenous Policing Bureau, Ontario Provincial Police): I'll be making it, sir.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Okay, Inspector, it's all yours. You have five minutes.

Insp Marcel Beaudin: Awesome. Thank you.

Many thanks for having us here and represented at the table.

Boozhoo. *Aaniin*. *Nindizhinikaaz* Marcel Beaudin. I'm a proud member of Henvey Inlet First Nation and a member of the Martin clan. I serve the OPP as an inspector with the indigenous policing bureau. I also serve as co-chair of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police's policing with indigenous peoples committee. This committee provides advice on matters relating to sustainable policing services and enhanced public safety for indigenous peoples throughout Canada. I've worked in and around first nations policing since 2005. Many of the conversations we were having 20 years ago about equity in policing continue today.

I'm joined virtually by OPP inspector Michael Kreisz, detachment commander of the Sioux Lookout cluster. Inspector Kreisz is responsible for policing three remote first nations through stream two agreements. He works closely with first nation leadership on local policing priorities, such as the enforcement of first nations bylaws, and is continually engaged with the Nishnawbe Aski legal services team to advance community safety and legal recognition efforts.

The OPP currently administers policing services for 17 first nations under the OFNPA. We provide dedicated services to three first nations through stream two agreements. We deliver direct policing services to 22 first nations. We collaborate with nine self-administered first nations police services represented by the Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario, which collectively serves 86 indigenous communities across the province. In 2025 we supported IPCO services with 888 calls for service through our provincial operations centre. The OPP provides integrated response, operational and investigative excellence and frontline backup when required due to a lack of resources and services as a result of the first nations policing structure. Under the Community Safety and Policing Act, the OPP is mandated to provide policing services to first nations communities.

Our recommendations are simple. However, I offer my professional and personal perspective to highlight why these recommendations matter. We recommend recognition of first nations policing as an essential service; long-term, sustainable funding for first nations police services beyond frontline policing, including funding for specialized units and funding for community engagement officers, often overlooked but vital to changing perceptions of police in communities; amendments to the Ontario Pension Board retirement policies for OPP members who may want to work for first nations police services; and designated funding to support enforcement of first nations laws and bylaws, along with prosecutorial mechanisms to uphold them.

I'm a proud OPP officer. My position provides me with an incredible platform to influence change from within my organization. However, because of my personal and professional backgrounds, I have always been drawn to policing from within indigenous services. Although offered opportunities for leadership positions in first nations police services, I have had to decline. Despite this honour, the instability and structure of first nations policing, coupled with a lack of adequate resources and services, makes it difficult to commit, especially with a family to support and a mortgage to pay.

Officers working in first nations policing demonstrate extraordinary courage. They risk not only their lives and their physical and mental safety but also their financial security. Their dedication deserves the structural support necessary to thrive.

First nations services in Ontario are further hindered by post-retirement restrictions that are tied to the Ontario Pension Board. These policies create systemic barriers to recruiting and retaining experienced OPP officers and leaders into first nations police services. Recently, the provincial judges pension plan was amended to temporarily suspend earnings-based limits for retired judges, allowing their pension payments to go unreduced, regardless of days served.

Even with equitable funding, we must recognize that first nations police services are starting from a place of disadvantage, with decades of underfunding and systemic inequality. Catching up requires more than parity; it requires intentional investment and structural change. Each community is unique in its approach. While legislative recognition and sustainable funding are critical, progress also depends on strong collaboration between federal, provincial, municipal and indigenous partners.

Inspector Kreisz can offer a localized perspective on the unique challenges and successes he has experienced working with communities in northern Ontario.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this important study. We welcome your questions. We are extremely hopeful for a fruitful outcome.

● (1635)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you, Inspector. You are right on time, so it's nicely done.

I will go, next, to my geographical next-door neighbour, Chief Swamp of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association and the Rama Police Service.

It's nice to see you again. You have five minutes, sir.

Chief Jerel Swamp (Chief of Police, Rama Police Service, and President, First Nations Chiefs of Police Association): Thank you.

My name is Jerel Swamp. I am a Mohawk from Akwesasne. I am the chief of police in Rama. I also sit on the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police board as vice-president.

I'd like to thank you for inviting me to speak today. I'm honoured to appear on behalf of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association, the FNCPA. We are the national voice for indigenous-led policing in Canada. Our member chiefs lead 36 first nations police services, collectively serving approximately 150 indigenous communities from coast to coast.

The First Nations Chiefs of Police Association brings senior leaders together to share practices, mentor the next generation and strengthen day-to-day operations. We coordinate leadership development, mid-level supervisor training, wellness supports, governance tools and culturally informed specialized training. We also provide policy advice to governments and partners so that public safety decisions are grounded in on-the-ground realities.

Modern indigenous policing in Canada took shape more than three decades ago with the creation of the first nations and Inuit policing program in 1991. Under tripartite agreements, first nations, provinces and territories, and the federal government sought to deliver policing that is professional, effective and culturally responsive. Those early steps were important. They recognized that safety solutions must reflect community realities, languages and legal traditions, and that trust is built through local presence and accountability.

Where indigenous police services are established, we see stronger relationships with leadership and elders, faster responses in remote settings, culturally safe victim support and innovative prevention with youth diversion, land-based healing and partnerships that reduce harm from drugs, family violence and exploitation. Indigenous services also collaborate effectively with neighbouring agencies on organized crime, major cases and emergencies. The majority of our officers live in and understand the communities they serve. It makes a difference when we can attend a scene and speak the language that is spoken, and when we understand the cultures, challenges and struggles within each community we serve.

Despite these successes, FNIPP-funded services are not consistently treated or resourced as an essential service. That single fact explains many of today's pressures. Without essential service recognition, funding is often short-term and under-indexed, which makes long-range planning and staff stability difficult.

The capital needs are extraordinary. Safe detachments, housing, communication towers and secure evidence facilities are chronically deferred. Equipment and information management systems lag behind modern standards, complicating disclosure and major case management. Compensation and benefits gaps hinder recruitment and retention against better-resourced services and agencies. Oversight and statutory obligations continue to grow without matched resources, increasing the risk for communities and officers. These constraints don't just affect the balance sheets. They affect safety outcomes. They also limit the ability of communities wanting to stand up a new indigenous police service to do so with a reasonable expectation of success.

We are a constructive partner. The FNCPA has been working closely with Public Safety Canada and the Assembly of First Nations to strengthen the FNIPP and help shape a legislative framework that confirms first nations policing as an essential and a permanent part of Canada's overall policing strategy. In parallel, we are investing in capacity.

What makes the biggest difference now? From our perspective, three practical steps would stabilize the present and build for the future.

Number one is legislative recognition of indigenous policing as an essential service, with clear roles and accountability shared across the orders of government and indigenous governments.

Number two is equitable multi-year funding—operations and capital—with transparent escalators, compensation parity, modern equipment and IT, and dedicated training and wellness supports.

● (1640)

Number three is a growth pathway for communities to seek new services, including start-up capital, staged staffing, integrated training and joint operations protocols, so that new services are built to last.

These steps align with the committee's terms of reference—namely, collaboration across federal, provincial-territorial, municipal and indigenous jurisdictions; addressing systemic barriers; and ensuring indigenous people can enter, thrive and lead in policing.

In closing, indigenous-led policing works. It saves lives. It strengthens trust and reflects the rights and responsibilities of communities to keep people safe. With essential service recognition and equitable tools, we can stabilize existing services and responsibly expand to meet community demand.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear. I welcome your questions on the history, on today's operational realities or on how we can practically design the legislation and funding to deliver safer outcomes for the communities we serve.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Chief Swamp, for your contribution.

We have one more witness.

We'll now go to Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler (Nishnawbe Aski Nation): Thank you for allowing me to appear before the committee this afternoon.

My name is Alvin Fiddler. I am the grand chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, representing 49 first nation communities across northern Ontario under Treaty 9 and part of Treaty 5.

Some of you may have heard that two weeks ago we were directed by our leadership to issue a state of emergency on gang violence.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, the interpretation was interrupted.

[*English*]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: There's still an ongoing social crisis related to drugs, so we had no choice but to issue that declaration.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): I'm sorry, Grand Chief. We're having a slight problem with our interpretation. If you would just give us a couple of seconds here.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: The interpretation is working now, Mr. Chair. Earlier there was a beeping sound that was potentially harmful for the interpreters and it was interrupting the interpretation.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): I'm sorry, Grand Chief Fiddler, please continue.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Two weeks ago, while we were having our forum in Thunder Bay to talk about policing and justice, one of our communities experienced a very tragic incident involving a shooting where two members of the community were shot by two youth who, we believe, came from the south. One of those community members tragically lost their life and one is still in the hospital.

Just five days later, another community in that territory, Brunswick House, went through a very similar incident where one of their community members was shot twice. Again, we believe it to be gang-related. That community member is still alive and still in the hospital. We hope and pray that he recovers.

Following these tragic incidents, our communities directed us to issue a declaration of emergency because many of our communities are on edge. They are fearful for their own safety. We have seen this pattern of drug dealers coming into our territories and in some cases taking over our communities by intimidation and by force. They carry weapons with them into the communities—guns or whatever weapons they can bring in. We had to issue this declaration of emergency. We've been meeting with our partners on [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Canada to follow up on this very serious issue that many of our communities are dealing with.

I was in Ottawa last week meeting with officials from Public Safety Canada. My message to them was that when we renegotiate this agreement on policing, Canada needs to come to the table with a bigger envelope because the negotiations that have happened over the last 35 years have not even come close to meeting the needs of our communities and our police service, NAPS. There's a real need to restart that process to ensure that there's meaningful dialogue and negotiations. It's not just to talk about money, but it's also to talk about the communities' ability to defend themselves, to defend their borders and to ensure that they have access to the resources they need to hire their own security and peacekeepers to complement whatever police services may be operating in their territory, whether it's NAPS or OPP.

We all recognize that the way we've been policing our communities for the last 35 years with this program is not working, so we need to fundamentally change how we do policing in the north and in that territory especially. That's why I'm telling Canada to come to the table with a bigger envelope and also to ensure [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

● (1645)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): It looks like we temporarily lost Grand Chief Fiddler.

Chief Fiddler, you are back. You just cut out for probably eight seconds or so.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: I'm not sure if you or the committee got my message, but the final point that I wanted to make was that we're urging Canada to come to the table with a bigger envelope—not the way they've been negotiating with us the last 35 years. We need to include all these other pieces in that package.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much for your testimony.

Thanks to all our witnesses as well. Now we will start the first round of questioning.

We begin with the Conservatives for six minutes with Mr. Melillo.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for joining us today.

I'd like to start with Grand Chief Fiddler. It's good to see you again, virtually this time.

Grand Chief, you spoke about the state of emergency regarding the drug-related shootings and the gang activity.

Chief Atlookan from Fort Hope said, “This is our daily reality.... Lives are being lost every day in our communities to shootings, to drugs, to violence. If these events were happening in southern Ontario, the response would be immediate and national. For us, there is silence.”

I thought those were very powerful words, Grand Chief. I'd just like to share them and simply ask if you agree with that sentiment.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Thank you for the question.

Chief Solomon Atlookan was part of our gathering here in Thunder Bay. He was one of our speakers when we had our press conference to announce the declaration.

Eabametoong is also under a lot of these social pressures. There have been a number of tragic events there that we don't really hear about in the news. I'm glad he was there to share his concerns, because it's not just in Brunswick House or in Ginoogaming; it's also happening in places like Eabametoong.

● (1650)

Eric Melillo: I appreciate that, Grand Chief. I'd like to ask you some questions, if you'll permit me. I appreciate your being here.

You spoke in your opening remarks about the illegal flow of drugs making it into many communities across NAN territory. For people from the south, it might seem counterintuitive. They might not understand how northern communities, many of which are remote and fly-in only, are being infiltrated by this gang activity.

I'm wondering if you could share more about what's happening on the ground with these drug dealers and how that's happening in the remote north.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: It's a real challenge for our police service, NAPS, and the OPP operating in Pikangikum, KI and North Caribou Lake to try to stem the flow of these drugs coming in, because people are very creative in how they ship these drugs in. Some of them are boldly chartering planes from Winnipeg in the middle of the night and landing in places like North Spirit Lake or Deer Lake. Some of them use road access and some of them use mail.

That's another important issue that I raised with some of the people I met last week in Ottawa. In my own community, for example, three weeks ago, a huge shipment of cocaine was intercepted at the post office. I forget how big it was. I think it was 160 grams of cocaine.

There are many ways that these drugs are coming in, and we're trying to find ways to equip our police services and communities so they can develop their own ways of security. In Neskantaga, they hired a K9 unit for a two-week period over the summer to try to slow down some of these drugs coming in. A lot of the time, the communities are doing this at their own expense, and they are asking Canada for help to put in place their own peacekeepers and their own security to complement what's already there.

Eric Melillo: I think some eyebrows were raised, Grand Chief, when you talked about chartering a plane to fly drugs into a remote community. That's obviously a detectable activity.

I'm wondering if you can speak to how coordination, or the lack thereof, is with other law enforcement agencies to work to address that. Maybe the OPP has thoughts on this as well.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's always a challenge. I'm sure the OPP representatives who are part of this hearing this afternoon can also speak to that.

It's very organized. We all need to understand how organized they are. Whether they're flying in from Winnipeg or Timmins.... I am in Timmins right now, working with the airlines, and a lack of security at these airports going north is another huge issue.

When you fly anywhere else in the country, you get checked and you go through some sort of security screening area, but when you're flying into and out of our territory, none of that infrastructure is there, which makes it easier for a drug dealer to go through our airports and fly into our communities.

Eric Melillo: Thank you.

Inspector Kreisz, I appreciate your being here virtually. Obviously, you have a lot of experience in Sioux Lookout and throughout the north. I appreciate all of your service.

I was wondering if you could also speak to that collaboration between the OPP and NAPS, and how that works with a lack of resources.

Inspector Michael Kreisz (Inspector, Ontario Provincial Police): Absolutely. It's probably hard to understand how poorly staffed some of these airports are. They typically have staff only when a flight is expected to come in. If it's in the middle of the night, there might be no staff at all working there.

With respect to our relationship with NAPS and our local band security teams, they are very good. We certainly have intelligence officers who work together. I can speak for my communities of North Caribou Lake, Wapekeka and KI, in that we have close relationships with our band security. They are doing checks at their airports. When they are intercepting drugs, they're alerting us immediately. Officers are attending and laying a charge, but I do agree with Grand Chief Fiddler that it is complicated.

For instance, north of Pick Lake, we have an airport that's in the middle of nowhere. There's no staff there whatsoever. You can charter a plane and land in some of these areas completely undetected.

● (1655)

Eric Melillo: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Eric, for your questions.

We now go to the Liberals for six minutes.

Ms. Lavack, please.

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): Thank you so much to everyone who is here giving testimony today. We really appreciate having this opportunity to learn and to hear from you.

I would like to start with Inspector Marcel Beaudin.

You mentioned the need for structural changes. Can you elaborate on that? Are there any specific models that exist for joint training in communities or community-based initiatives that exist that you feel could be replicated nationally? What do those structural changes look like?

Insp Marcel Beaudin: Yes, when I'm talking about structural changes, for us, if we are going to have an integrated response, say, or if we are going to target organized crime—and I don't want to get into the details associated with that—it's to provide opportunities to actually have investigative excellence and to be able to see that through. That way, we have the ability to intercept drugs, detect, deter and ensure that we are doing our job as good as we possibly can. That way, we are protecting the communities we are charged to serve.

I look even at the grand chief's comments about the lack of people in airports and the lack of security. Today, I went in for coffee just around the corner, at a Tim Hortons. There were seven people serving me coffee. There were seven people working. I look at some of the numbers associated with our Ontario first nations policing agreement, and some of the communities have four officers. Some of them have two.

When I'm talking about structural change, I'm talking about some first nation police services that have a constable, a sergeant and an inspector. In this distance between sergeant and inspector, there's just so much that goes on in between there, so it's about really creating the structure for the police service to be successful and to thrive.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you.

Are there any lessons learned from the OPP working in partnership with indigenous police services in terms of delivering that really culturally sensitive service to the community?

Insp Marcel Beaudin: I've said multiple times—and I'm glad that Chief Swamp is on here—that there's nobody that polices within a first nations community better than the first nations chiefs of police, represented also by the Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario. We have the privilege of policing 22 directly within the OPP, administering 17 and also having the three that Inspector Kreisz has.

Within the indigenous policing bureau, after the tragedies of Ipperwash, we certainly learned a lot of lessons. We have, under the indigenous policing bureau, an indigenous awareness training unit to provide culturally responsive training to our members who go into communities.

We have the MMIWG implementation team to implement the calls to justice across our organization. We have the provincial liaison team, which came out of the tragedies of Ipperwash, which allows for, in times of crisis, communication strategies and building relationships with people and which, hopefully, can leverage situations, and then we have the Ontario first nations policing agreement.

We have regular conversations and interactions with the Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario. The superintendent for the indigenous policing bureau is a non-voting member of the Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario. I talked to multiple chiefs of the nine this week. We are in continual conversations as to how we support each other to become better and how we make sure we're filling the gaps with the finite resources that we all have.

● (1700)

Ginette Lavack: Thank you very much.

I would like to move now to Police Chief Jerel Swamp.

You mentioned that you would have some ideas to share with us about how to practically design legislation. Could you please share some of those ideas with us?

Chief Jerel Swamp: The biggest issue we have in first nations is that we're funded under the FNIPP, which is a program in itself, so it doesn't fund us for stable services. We're funded under the discretionary board of the treasury department. What we're funded for doesn't create stability for our services. The police services that we have under that program were funded for either one to three years at a time, which doesn't create the stability or the planning that we should have within our communities for community safety.

The other issue I see is what Grand Chief Fiddler was talking about: crime in our communities. If you look at crime severity indexes across Canada, you're looking at a 37% higher number of violent crimes in our first nation communities. Why is that? Under FNIPP, we were limited until recently, such that we couldn't have specialized services in our police services. We couldn't have canine units. We couldn't have a drug unit. We couldn't have a major crime unit. We couldn't have victim services. If we wanted those services, we had to find another source of funding. One chief said that we've become black belts in sources of funding so that we can better serve our communities.

Under FNIPP, even though they alleviated the terms and conditions so that we could have specialized services, they didn't influx any resources or any money into the services, so we're still left without. We're dealing with gang members who are coming into our communities, but we're not given the money and adequate resources to deal with that effectively.

Our officers in our first nation police services are well experienced and well trained because they have to do investigations from A to Z. They don't have a specialized unit where they can pass that information on to a search warrant writer or to an emergency response team to execute a warrant. The officers do it themselves. The squad members and the detachments do it themselves as well as the police services. We became very experienced in how we police our communities.

That goes to the retention problem that we have. Because we're so experienced and because we have a lack of resources and pension and wage parity inequities, other agencies are seeking our officers. They do it because they can promise them longevity, a long career within their agencies.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to our next questioner from the Bloc Québécois.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Grand Chief Fiddler, I want to begin by welcoming you and saying that I'm happy to see you again. We had a good meeting last week. I want to point out that you're a neighbour to my riding.

Less than a year ago, in December 2024, the Government of Ontario recognized the Nishnawbe-Aski police force as an essential service. I want to commend your nation for its determination in advocating for this recognition for many years. This is a pivotal moment in history.

Obviously, this change did not happen overnight. Could you tell us what was required at the policy, institutional and community levels, as well as in terms of communications, to get to this point? What message does this send to the Government of Canada regarding the importance of recognizing indigenous police forces as essential and treating them fairly?

● (1705)

[*English*]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Thank you so much for the question. You're right that Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a leader across the country in terms of becoming constituted as an essential service, which is the agreement we signed last year with the Province of Ontario. It was in response to a number of tragic deaths we saw in our communities.

We know that even though our police chiefs...and I applaud the police chiefs who are on this call from indigenous police services, and the same with NAPS. We tried very hard for the last 35 years to make this work for our communities, but we all saw the gaps that were there. That's why 10 years ago we endeavoured to work with the Province of Ontario to create legislation that would lead to NAPS becoming deemed an essential service. That's the agreement we signed with Ontario last December. It was a collaborative effort. We worked very closely with the province to co-draft legislation that would lead us to this point.

I am grateful for the partnership we have in Ontario, first with the Liberal Party and now with the current Conservative Party, to allow us to do this work. It allows NAPS to actually do adequate and effective policing, which every community deserves to have in the country.

I'll try to be very brief about what has happened in the last year. It's been almost 10 months or 11 months since we signed this agreement. In order for NAPS to meet those standards for building codes, we actually need to double our budget. That's what Ontario has done. They've come to the table and more or less doubled our budget. Canada is dragging its feet to come to that same table and renegotiate those figures to ensure that NAPS has the resources it needs to meet those standards and to ensure that it's able to deliver effective and adequate policing in that territory.

Meegwetch for the question.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: *Chi-meegwetch*. Thank you for your answer, particularly the last part of it, and for your leadership.

You mentioned the fact that Ontario has doubled its funding, and I wanted to emphasize that. I understand that the federal government is still dragging its feet when it comes to increasing your funding. The federal government is absent at the moment, even though you have greater recognition and more responsibilities. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: The message we received when I was in Ottawa last week, when I met with the minister and the deputy minister and other senior officials from Public Safety Canada, was to wait until the budget was announced on November 4. I'm crossing my fingers. I don't know what else to do to ensure that Canada comes to the table, because the next round will be starting up soon. My message to the minister and deputy minister was that they needed to be prepared to come to the table with a much bigger envelope.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Grand Chief, as you so rightly pointed out, it often takes a tragedy to bring about the change that first nations need. This recognition by Ontario was long overdue and required considerable effort on the part of your nation.

In your opinion, what needs to happen now, particularly at the federal level, to ensure that other indigenous police services in Canada do not have to overcome the same obstacles that yours did before they are recognized as essential services?

[*English*]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's a really difficult question. To be honest, I have mixed feelings about federal legislation on policing. We just went through a national experience with child welfare where we negotiated a national package, which we supported and were a part of. Ultimately, it was defeated by other regions for whatever reason.

I think this one-size-fits-all approach on policing across the country will be very difficult. That's why we went ahead and negotiated with the Province of Ontario to ensure that we were able to get to the point where we can be constituted as an essential service, which NAPS is right now. In terms of any federal piece of legislation on policing, I wish you good luck. Whoever does it, I hope it happens, but....

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: *Meegwetch*.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

We'll go to to our next questioner.

We have the Conservative Party for five minutes with Billy Morin.

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

Thank you to our guests for providing testimony today. I want to go back to Grand Chief Fiddler.

Chief, I have a few quick questions for you.

You mentioned that your communities have declared a state of emergency. Is that right?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's right.

Billy Morin: You also mentioned that funding, much like we've heard from the other testimony today, has been woefully inadequate. Is that correct?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's correct.

Billy Morin: Are the nations themselves able to run deficits to make up for the lack of funding, or are they just bogged down in other crises regarding social services?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Under the first nations and Inuit policing program, first nations police services are not allowed to run a deficit. There are very strict rules. I'm sure Chief Swamp can attest to some of the terms and conditions under that current program.

For example, when we were trying to negotiate these tripartite agreements, we were not even allowed to hire our own legal counsel to help us negotiate. Whenever we were involved in these so-called negotiations, Canada and Ontario would come into the room with their legal teams or legal counsel. Whereas with us, we weren't even allowed that opportunity to have our legal counsel at the table. There are a lot of things that are just wrong with this program.

Billy Morin: Chief, there was an announcement made in October from the Liberal government about 1,000 new RCMP and CBSA officers. Were you included in that announcement in any way, shape or form?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: I don't believe we were. I would have to talk to the other first nations police services in the region, but I don't believe we were.

That's why we've been doing our own work at the NAPS and NAN levels to negotiate for additional resources in order for us to be able to hire more police officers. This is what we're doing right now. We're recruiting. We are training and graduating more officers for NAPS. We still have a ways to go to try to reset that complement.

Billy Morin: Chief, what message does it send? We're looking at a record deficit from the Liberal government of $60 billion to $80 billion, give or take either way. It can run deficits to address the crises that Canadians... Rightfully so, the crises should be addressed, but first nations and indigenous policing can't up their budgets to address the crises they have been in for a long time.

What message does it send to your communities when the government can run deficits to increase policing services, but you can't?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: It sends the message that our safety is not a priority.

The other thing I raised last week when I was in Ottawa was that part of this discussion needed to include the recent pieces of legislation, Bill C-5 and Ontario's Bill 5. There is growing pressure on our communities to open up for development and to identify projects in the regions.

We all know there's a correlation. This was documented by the commission for MMIWG. Whenever there is a large-scale project or activity, there is an increase in crime or violence, especially against women and girls. That's our other concern as we are trying to ensure our communities have access to these resources in order for them to keep their people safe. There are these threats that are also happening from Canada and from Ontario as well.

Billy Morin: Thanks, Chief.

It seems like indigenous communities are being forgotten again.

I want to go to Chief Swamp. You are the president of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association. We heard that there is possible legal action against Canada regarding equitable funding. We also know there's a human rights complaint against the Government of Canada when it comes to equitable funding.

Can you provide us your comments on that and if that's still outstanding?

● (1715)

Chief Jerel Swamp: There are several outstanding human rights complaints against Canada, currently, when it comes to inequitable funding and the FNIPP program. The Indigenous Police Chiefs of Ontario currently have a human rights case against Canada.

There was recently a Supreme Court of Canada decision in regard to the inadequate funding you mentioned with Chief Fiddler. There was a community and a police service in Quebec that went into a deficit of over $1 million in their policing. They had to file a human rights complaint in order to get that heard.

It ultimately went to the Supreme Court of Canada, and its ruling was that Canada and the Province of Quebec didn't follow the honour of the Crown when they negotiated with the police service in the community. They were ordered to pay back that $1 million because they didn't negotiate fairly, and they didn't go to negotiate when the community said, “This is what our community's needs are, and in order for us to provide these needs to the community, we're going into a deficit.”

The Province of Quebec and Canada didn't negotiate, and they didn't take that seriously, which is not taking the safety and security of our communities seriously. It did go to the Supreme Court of Canada. The ruling was that Canada and Quebec had to pay that community back. There are ripple effects, then, in regard to that.

The negotiations we have had in the past, under the FNIPP program, with all of our police services, were take-it-or-leave-it negotiations. There were no meaningful negotiations. They would bring an agreement to us at the eleventh hour, on the last week of March, and say, “Sign this agreement or not.” We were forced to sign an agreement. That's not negotiating with our communities, our police services leaders and our community leaders in an honourable manner. I'm hoping the Supreme—

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to get you to stop there. We've gone quite a bit over time here.

Perhaps the next questioner will have you pick up there. I know what you have to say is really important.

We will go to five minutes for the Liberal Party.

Is it Mr. Philip Earle or Brendan Hanley?

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): It's going to Brendan.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll split my time with Philip.

I wanted to recognize all of you, both for your service and for your testimony today.

Inspector Beaudin, we had a brief chat before the committee began. As you said, you're a member of Henvey Inlet First Nation. You also felt a personal attachment to the issue of indigenous policing and to what we need to do. You mentioned that you've been in this conversation for 20 years. I wanted to give you a chance to talk about that. We don't have a lot of time, but maybe give a quick explanation of that personal connection.

Insp Marcel Beaudin: For anyone who has a first nation background and has the opportunity to impact their communities in a positive way, it becomes extremely personal to everyone. We all have a responsibility to public safety in here, regardless of where we sit, what our hat looks like and what our uniform looks like. We're all in this together. You said it excellently, sir, before we started. We're all trying to achieve the same thing.

For me, I look at the things that are in front of us and the opportunities we have. What a great opportunity we all have here to put things in place and in motion to impact the future. Whatever we decide to do today is going to impact the future of first nations communities and the safety of them. In the absence of our putting things in place for their safety, we should expect bad things to happen, because we've lived this for the last 30 years. As a result, we're here today. We're having the same conversations we had 20 years ago.

There are some really important things out there, like Bill C-2, which provides powers to search mail and allows us to do things that have the ability to protect community safety. When we're talking about numbers, dollars and cents, we're really taking about how we ensure these communities are as safe as possible.

Like I mentioned to you earlier, there are conversations out there where there are bad actors, nefarious groups and criminal organizations who know that first nation communities are underfunded and under-resourced when it comes to policing. They're seen as a safe house for people who want to perform nefarious activities.

I appreciate your asking me that question, sir. I hope that answers it.

● (1720)

Brendan Hanley: Yes, that's excellent.

I'll hand that back to Mr. Earle for the rest of the session.

Philip Earle: Thank you all for your public service and to you, Grand Chief, for the great work you do in your communities.

I'm drawn to the discussion around aviation. It's my background. With my colleague on the other side, I share the view that we are seeing a lot of communities where there is access and there is not security screening.

I want to address my question to the grand chief.

Recognizing that 89 airports in Canada have CATSA screening but a very small number have cargo screening, would it be your recommendation to this committee, Grand Chief, that for the remaining 1,300 airports in Canada that charter flights could operate from, such screening would be in place?

If so, how would that benefit communities such as yours?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's something we definitely support. Some of that work is already starting to happen. I was in Sioux Lookout today, for example. I was on my way to Timmins and I stopped in Sioux Lookout. They have a little security area there. I don't know how effective it is, but....

We have 28 remote airports in our territory. Some of the major areas like Timmins, where I am right now, are a bit of a hub. It's the same with Thunder Bay and Sioux Lookout. If there were more resources for those airports to do more screening, I think that would definitely help.

I think the other thing that would help our communities to defend their borders, at least for the fly-in communities, is if they were made aware of charters coming in from, say, Winnipeg. I'm not sure who said it earlier in the hearing today, but there are planes coming in from, say, Winnipeg, in the middle of the night. I think there needs to be some notice, process, regulation, policy or rule to ask these airlines to call someone. I don't know who that someone would be—maybe the chief—to let them know there's a plane coming in, so they can possibly send in some security to check the plane.

Right now it's wide open. There's nothing in terms of regulation or process for security.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

We'll go on to our next questioner. It's the Bloc Québécois for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Swamp, throughout your long career in the police, including in your past role as the Akwesasne chief of police and in your current position as the Rama chief of police, you have seen the challenges faced by indigenous police services.

Could you tell me the differences you have seen between OPP officers and indigenous police force officers, particularly with regard to wages and benefits? Is there a disparity in rural communities?

[*English*]

Chief Jerel Swamp: Policing in first nations is vastly different within each province. There are different standards and different police service acts that the police services in first nations either follow or they don't follow. In Quebec, there are 22 stand-alone first nation police services. They follow the Police Act in Quebec, yet there are seven levels of policing under that act. First nation police services aren't even mentioned in any of those levels.

In Ontario, the first nation police services don't follow the Police Services Act. Nishnawbe Aski Police Service is a prime example of when a police service opts in through the opt-in process and they are given the funding to meet the adequate and effective policing standards. They doubled their service, because that's exactly what they need to provide safety and security for their communities.

What we're looking at is that, under the FNIPP over the last 30 years, they said that NAPS didn't need that many officers, yet once they went through the adequate and effective policing standards, they saw that they needed double what they had and even to triple it, because we know there are gaps. With the flights that are coming into our territories, that is a big gap. Is that a policing responsibility? Is it a safety responsibility for our communities? Yes, it is.

Across Canada, 20% of our first nation communities don't have road access 12 months out of the year, so our police services are not only dealing with dirt roads but fly-in communities, and they're working alone. Many of our police service police officers are working remotely, alone in these communities, when we have 30% higher levels of violent crime in our communities. Our officers are dealing with it alone.

The mental health of our officers is also a challenge for us, and it's an issue across first nations all across Canada. We're dealing effectively with the issues of drugs, intergenerational trauma and the higher violent crime that comes with the drugs and the alcohol, and we're dealing with it effectively. We're also dealing, within our own services, with the mental issues that we have in dealing with those stresses as well.

● (1725)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you, Chief and President.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much, Chief Swamp.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): My clock reads 5:26, and we're going to be tight with time here, so it's four minutes to the Conservatives.

Go ahead, Mr. Melillo.

Eric Melillo: Thank you, Chair. In the interest of time, I'll try to be quick.

I'd like to come back to Inspector Kreisz.

You spoke about that coordination between OPP and NAPS. I know from where I lived in Kenora in Treaty 3 territory, there has been a lot of similar coordination with OPP and Treaty 3 police. I know that has stretched OPP thin. Obviously, Treaty 3 is underfunded and under-resourced.

I'm wondering if you could share the pressures that this coordination has put on OPP in Sioux Lookout and speak to it in that context.

Insp Michael Kreisz: It does put pressure on us, but you have to remember that northern communities are 100 kilometres apart, so oftentimes our officers can't respond directly to those 28 remote communities north of us.

I am responsible for Pickle Lake, and we do assist the Mishkeegogamang NAPS detachment when they're short, but it absolutely does impact staffing. We'll have only two officers working in Pickle Lake and, if they're responsible for additional communities, that puts a major strain on that detachment, for instance.

I would like to add that we all work together. Indigenous services are routinely backing up the OPP as well and, as Inspector Beaudin said, we see it as being all in this together. We're constantly trying to back each other up.

Eric Melillo: Thank you.

I'll share the rest of my time with Mr. Zimmer.

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

Thanks to our witnesses.

My questions will be for the members of the OPP.

A recent article in The Toronto Star dated September 18 says:

> In a recent statement, a spokesperson for Solicitor General Michael Kerzner said "Ontario police services do not have the resources to attend residential addresses to confiscate previously lawful but now prohibited firearms from lawful gun owners."

I've heard from your testimonies that your resources are already stretched thin. Do you support using those limited resources to confiscate law-abiding firearm owners' firearms?

Insp Marcel Beaudin: I'll agree with whatever the solicitor general said.

Bob Zimmer: Yeah. Even just as an officer, you have enough issues with criminals and crime in the community and lack the resources to really tackle that issue. Then you're receiving this mandate federally and being tasked with collecting what belongs to law-abiding firearm owners. You're being tasked now with going after their firearms. Do you support that?

Insp Marcel Beaudin: At the end of day, there's a pile of things that are dropped on our plate for public safety. If there are ways we can focus on more nefarious activity, more organized crime and on keeping communities safe, that's probably better bang for our buck.

● (1730)

Bob Zimmer: Sure.

I'll put the same question to the other officer on screen.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): This is your last question.

Insp Michael Kreisz: I agree with what Inspector Beaudin said. It's an incredibly complicated issue, though. I'd have to see the framework that's in place to accomplish it and if there are additional resources being offered to accomplish it. We have a lot of policing priorities, as you've heard, in the far north. We're stretched very thin. There's a lot to tackle right now.

Bob Zimmer: With my last few seconds left, I take it that, again, tackling crime, criminals and the issues in the community are a little bit more important than taking away law-abiding firearm owners' firearms.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Okay. Thank you very much, everyone.

To our first panel of witnesses, you gave us great testimony here today. Thank you to our guests here in person and those appearing remotely. We appreciate your contributions.

We will suspend for a few moments to clear this panel and bring in our next. Thank you very much.

● (1730)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1740)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): We are back with our second panel for our study on indigenous policing.

We have two guests with us today for the second round. We will begin with Kahnawake. We'll have the chief peacekeeper, Chief Dwayne Zacharie, for five minutes. Then we'll go to Long Point First Nation.

Chief Zacharie, you have five minutes. The floor is yours. Thank you.

Chief Dwayne Zacharie (Chief Peacekeeper, Kahnawake Peacekeepers): Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation.

For nearly 30 years, I've served my community, providing services and making sure the community is safe and secure. In my estimation, without first nations policing, there's no such thing as national security in this country. All of Canada sits on indigenous land. Indigenous police services safeguard critical infrastructure. They uphold the rule of law across the regions they police together. At this moment, there are 36 self-administered first nations indigenous police services, and they are policing about one-third of the country's landmass. That's about 156 communities across the country.

Right now, they're all struggling. There are a number of different reasons why they struggle. At the end of the day, they're struggling because of inequities through the first nations and Inuit policing program. All first nations, one way or another, are providing services and operational excellence because of their local knowledge and their investment in their communities. Many of the first nations police officers live and work in the same community they're responsible for. In Kahnawake, our peacekeepers speak the language, understand the culture, know every family and know every road in the territory. In our community, there are no civic numbers. There are no street numbers. We need to know everybody in our community. That's 10,000 people.

Regarding our location, we're just outside the city of Montreal. We have major highways going through our territory. Every single day, we have over 130,000 commuters using our territory to get to Montreal. That influx of population puts a strain on our policing services. There's no recognition of that. There's no reason why the government never thinks, “Hey, we have to do something about this.”

There's an argument here. The argument I'm trying to make is that, without first nations policing, there's no such thing as national security. Without us, what happens? Who fills that gap? If somebody says, “Hey, we'll step up and fill that gap”, what will the cost then be to Canada and taxpayers? What's going to happen to them? Who's going to foot the bill for this?

We hear numerous reports about how good first nations policing is and how it provides services to communities, yet it's doing this for pennies on the dollar. There's no equality. There's a difference between what first nations policing is doing and what other policing is doing. For lack of a better term, I'll call that mainstream policing. Why is there a difference? Why are first nations police services resourced at lower rates? That's a question we've always had. We never seem to get the answer.

Here is one of the things that are key to all this: When you invest in indigenous policing, you get an amazing return because of all those first nations and indigenous police officers. The job they do is invaluable to their communities. When you invest in indigenous policing, the cost will be much lower than having to get someone else to come into the community who doesn't know the reality, the culture, the tradition, the language and the trauma indigenous people have suffered over the years. All those indigenous police officers understand this and work exceptionally hard to provide services to their communities.

Right now, the outlook is bleak. Every one of those services has to pick and choose how to provide service to their community because they're so poorly resourced. Over the years, we've seen small, incremental changes, but it's so glacially slow. Things need to change. On other panels, people testified that the only time they see change or movement—when people take notice—is when there's a tragedy. We don't need that to happen. We need to do something now. The time for half measures and talk is over. Let's make some changes. Let's do something that really makes a difference in indigenous communities.

● (1745)

Our officers work without the same pensions over their careers. They have facilities that are outdated. The equipment is often second-hand or obsolete. Funding agreements are short-term. The administrative functions are super heavy in terms of the reporting requirements. We need to be able to plan for the future. We need to be able to see first nation policing, indigenous policing, grow and expand to provide those services.

I'll keep coming back to that theme of the safety and security of all Canadians. Without indigenous policing, there's no such thing as public security or national security. We need to invest in the infrastructure as well as the structures themselves within indigenous policing services. Without us, who would take up that mantle? Who would fill the gap? How will it change things if indigenous policing becomes extinct? There's a cost to that. I think regular, everyday Canadians will have to take up the brunt of that, because there's no one better at doing the job of indigenous policing than the indigenous police services themselves.

As we think about it and talk about it, somewhere in the future, with 634 indigenous communities across this country at the moment—

● (1750)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Chief Peacekeeper Zacharie, could I get you to quickly wind up? We can probably get more during your testimony shortly.

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much for your opening statement.

We'll now go to the chief of Long Point First Nation.

You have five minutes.

Chief Steeve Mathias (Chief, Long Point First Nation): *Kwe* and good evening.

First, I understand you're in Ottawa, and I want to welcome you to Algonquin unceded territory. I would have much preferred to attend in person, but for many reasons I wasn't able to travel today to be with you. I'm glad that I'm able to participate virtually so that we have the opportunity to share the experience of what we're going through here in my community of Winneway.

I wanted to take this opportunity, too, Mr. Chair, to acknowledge our member of Parliament, Sébastien Lemire, because he got me the time that was allocated for me this evening.

I prepared a brief. I don't know if I sent it to the right place. If it didn't come through, I'll be more than happy to follow up on that afterwards.

I wanted to share a bit of what's happened in my community. I was a former police officer, and I served my community for six years. I went to training in one of the Innu communities. It was Mashteuiatsh back then. It was under the American police service. I served under that police service back then.

I've heard testimony on how community police officers are having to serve the safety of their community by being all alone. I lived that back then. I was the only police officer. I had to put in seven hours active and 17 hours standby. We had shifts. I think they were seven on, seven off. Often, I wasn't able to rely on any backup.

Then, in the early nineties, they abolished that police service and created these tripartite agreements. My community signed and renewed I think twice a tripartite agreement. Then, when I was a chief back then—I was elected—they were taking this attitude of take it or leave it. As I heard from another panel earlier, it's an ultimatum that they give you. Either you take it or you leave it, and you have until midnight on March 31 to accept the deal. It's like putting a gun to your head and saying, “You sign this or you're not going to get anything.”

In 2006, we said no, because we were having to tap into other programs. We had to tap into other essential services for dollars to maintain our police service. We were incurring huge deficits every year—$100,000 for a small community like mine. It was completely unacceptable. We were asking for a measly extra $100,000 to renew our tripartite agreement in 2006, and they wouldn't budge on that. They said, “No, you take what we're giving you or leave it.” We didn't renew it, but the council said that we were going to maintain our police service, which we've done.

They keep oppressing us and telling us, “Look, your police officers are not sworn in now. We're going to cancel their oaths of office so they cannot perform their duties as police officers in your community.” It got to the point that they sent a bailiff to deliver those letters to our police officers.

● (1755)

It's a bloody shame how they treated my community. Even though what we've done.... We're sovereign. We swore in our own police officers. They came under our traditional ways of things and what we're doing. We had a smudging ceremony. They swore, not on the Bible but with a feather and with their hand. They swore that they were going to serve with honour and to protect our people and keep them safe.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): If you're able to wrap up here, then we'll get into some questions and probably expand on that a little.

Chief Steeve Mathias: What I want to wrap up on is that.... Why are we being exposed to some kind of a situation? After they shut down our police detachment, they got the SQ to serve my community.

The SQ served my community right until today. That was 20 years ago. When they first took over, it was two police officers per vehicle, and they had two vehicles. We had four police officers from the SQ here 24-7. It was to the point that it was costing them $1.8 million per year. We were asking for $500,000.

Money is not the issue in my community. It's all about politics. It's all about keeping us oppressed and under control so that we don't create a community that is under no supervision, where we can maintain peace and order in our community.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

We'll probably get you to expand on that in just a second, but we do have to start our first round of questioning.

With that, we go to the Conservative Party and Mr. Morin for six minutes.

Billy Morin: Thank you, Chair.

I'll start with Chief Mathias.

Thank you, Chief, for coming today and making time for us.

We often hear from the government that it's all about the nation-to-nation relationship, but then it's giving you ultimatums. Does it really feel like you're in a nation-to-nation, respectful relationship?

Chief Steeve Mathias: No, there's no such thing as nation to nation. I've been chief for over 17 years now. I was a member of council, too. I was a councillor. I was a negotiator. I've always been active at those negotiating tables. There's no nation-to-nation relationship taking place there. It's very paternalistic discussions that are taking place around that table.

Once we know.... We keep maintaining our position on how we want to have the delivery of our services of policing. We want a community-based police approach, not a police service that is just going to be there to arrest people or give people tickets. That's what's happening in my community right now.

The minute that we start going out publicly and criticizing our policing services, the SQ come here and start giving people tickets. They'll pull over our youths when they're driving around with their four-wheelers, saying that it's because they didn't wear a helmet. I had one councillor today, and it was because he didn't make a complete stop. There are a lot of other things that have to be done in the community here. We have drug dealers from Toronto who have moved into the community now. They're not doing much about it. That's how pathetic things are right now.

● (1800)

Billy Morin: Thanks, Chief.

You know, funding is a reality. We've heard from several testimonies that funding is a challenge. Many first nations struggle with social funding, running a government and running a small nation. You mentioned funding even for yourself. You asked for an additional $100,00 or $500,000, and that was denied.

I'm assuming that your nation can't, by itself, afford to cover the costs of community policing. Is that correct?

Chief Steeve Mathias: No, we don't have our own-source revenue to support a service like policing. After 2006, when they abolished our police detachment, in 2008 we signed a framework agreement only with the Quebec government. We had a letter of understanding specifically on policing too, to resolve policing because we wanted to reinstate our police service. We've been trying to negotiate ever since.

Canada was refusing to take part in what we were doing for all different kinds of reasons: “We don't have the money right now. The program is under review.” They kept giving us all different kinds of excuses. Even when I intervened, a few years ago, with Premier Legault, he said, “Okay, Steeve, if things don't move within the next couple of months, I'll personally get involved.” What happened? It was the minister of public security and the minister of aboriginal affairs who made a joint public announcement, through a press conference, saying that they were going to create a pilot project to create a regional police for the three Anishinabe communities in the Timiskaming district, and that they were going to appoint a rapid response team.

It was four years ago that a rapid response team was supposed to deal with the situation we're in right now, and what have they done? They built two new police stations—one for the two other communities. They have brand new police detachments, which cost $9 million each—and they increased their operating budget significantly too—but for my community...nothing. All that we have is a trailer that serves the SQ when they come here, so that they have a place to go to the washroom. That's it. There's nothing—

Billy Morin: Thank you, Chief. I just want to get one more in before my time's up. Thank you for those answers.

I have one more for Chief Peacekeeper Dwayne Zacharie. Kahnawake is near the border, and the government recently announced 1,000 CBSA officers, border agents. I'm sure you have your struggles with the border and the port of Montreal—nefarious actions, drug dealers and things of that nature in Kahnawake.

Were you involved with any supports from Canadian border agencies or any of the recent announcements of funding going to those organizations?

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: That's a great question. Just for your information, Kahnawake is actually right next door to the city of Montreal. Akwesasne is actually the community that borders Quebec, Ontario and New York State.

However—pertaining to your question—I do know, because I've been in some discussions, that, when it comes to 1,000 additional officers for the RCMP or for the CBSA, we're not involved in those discussions. First nations policing is left out of it. In our minds, the government keeps shoring up these other services, making them bigger, stronger and more capable, yet they keep us down. They don't provide us with the resourcing we need, and that's where the gaps happen. That's where organized crime infiltrations and impacts to national security happen.

What we're here to say is that first nations policing can do the work. We just need to be properly resourced. We need the equity and security to be able to do what other services can do. Without technology, infrastructure, any of that assistance or resources, that's when tragedies happen. That's when the impacts are felt across the country and it becomes a big deal, and that's the only time people respond to it.

● (1805)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

Now, as our next questioner, we have Mr. Hanley for six minutes.

Brendan Hanley: Thank you very much, both of you, for being here and for your testimony.

Chief Zacharie, in just following up on some of the things you mentioned during your opening remarks, you said that you had been following some of our meetings to date. I'm not sure whether you saw the other day. I believe it was Chief Denny, from Eskasoni First Nation, who actually pointed out the model of policing that you have through the peacekeepers at Kahnawake. I am just wondering whether you could tell me a little more about how the model that you're using works and how that might differ from the traditional SQ approach.

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: That's a great question.

I'm really proud of the Kahnawake Peacekeepers. One thing we do that is different and unique is that we're one of the only indigenous police services in North America that's made up entirely of indigenous people, and the vast majority of our members come directly from the community of Kahnawake.

Who better to provide the services that we do than people directly from the community? We know the culture. We know the language. We know the realities. We know the people. We're part of the fabric of the society. That's the difference. We understand and we know our clientele. We know our community members.

Brendan Hanley: I'm going to press you a little on that. In terms of your operational model, I completely understand what you said and you made that very clear in your opening remarks.

If you were to compare from an operational point of view in terms of visits, drop-ins and more proactive and preventative measures that play a role, how does the model you've developed work operationally on the ground?

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: Our model is that every day we go out and try to build trust with the community. We don't say, “This is the model you get. This is how it's going to be done.” We have communications with the community and we go from there. We actually practise true community policing. Other services use it as a buzzword, but for us, every single day is a new day to build trust.

Last year, we did about 15,000 files. We have over 130,000 people a day coming through our community, so we're providing service not only to our community members but also to people from communities that surround our territory. That makes us very valuable to national security here in this country.

We do have prevention programs, and we find that being able to do these prevention programs—getting into our schools and meeting with the youth and community members—goes a long way in helping to reduce certain types of statistics. We have domestic violence programming. We have drug programming and drug recidivism programs. We have our own court system in the community. We have a program called Skén:nen Aonsón:ton, which is alternative dispute resolution.

All of these programs go a step further in helping us to do the job that we do in our territory.

Brendan Hanley: All of those sound really interesting. The more specific information you can give us, even after the fact in written form, would be very valuable for our committee and, therefore, for the recommendations that this committee puts forward.

You spoke very clearly about the return on the investment, and it makes complete sense that there would be one with this kind of community policing. Do you collect data? Do you have specific measures to show the return on investment, or is that possibly a gap? Is that something you're looking to refine?

● (1810)

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: I definitely think it's cheaper to build trust than to try to rebuild it after things have gone wrong. The investment in indigenous policing is paramount. We fill a gap. We fill a void. If we were to go away, as I said earlier, who would fill that gap and what would the cost be later?

There have been a few studies, actually, that show what it would cost for other police services to come in and try to fill the void it would create if we went away, and then you'd still be dealing with all of those trust issues.

Policing has a stigma attached to it, and in indigenous communities, we have to work really hard. Think about it this way: We're doing that job now. We're trying to provide safety and security to our community, and the model we employ speaks volumes about the type of people we have—

Brendan Hanley: Chief, I'm going to interrupt, if I may, because I only have about 30 seconds left.

I wanted to quickly ask you to describe the main infrastructure needs you have that you could point to.

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: Absolutely. We're in a building now that's over 20 years old. It needs tons of work. I know that in the province of Quebec, every single service needs infrastructure resourcing to be able to continue to provide services to their communities.

As I said before, some services don't have vehicles. They don't have technology. They don't have access to the Internet or good communications systems. All of these are areas where we need proper resourcing, and we need it quickly.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much. That was right on time, actually. You're only 10 seconds over. That was nicely done.

We go now for six minutes to the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Mathias, first, I am glad to be able to once again refer to you as “chief”. I congratulate you and thank you for being here.

I am particularly concerned about the situation in Winneway. I know you know that because I went to your office on the first day of my election campaign to talk about that situation and about the police in particular.

In practical terms, what are the consequences of not having a police force based in your community? Do you have any statistics to share with us about how crime on your streets has changed over the past 20 years, or since the Winneway police force was abolished? Is there a connection between the loss of an independent police force and an increase in crime?

● (1815)

Chief Steeve Mathias: When the Sûreté du Québec took over policing duties in Long Point, Winneway, in 2006, the Témiscamien was publishing monthly statistics on incidents occurring in Winneway. That went on for about a year, and we saw that there were more police reports in Winneway under the Sûreté du Québec than there were in the 17 or 18 other municipalities in Témiscamingue. The newspaper stopped publishing that data because it showed that there was a great need in Winneway and that the Sûreté du Québec had lost control of the situation in the community here.

Still today, when a police car drives down the hill in Winneway, people jump on social media to warn people to be careful because the police are in town. It seems to me that people are not supposed to be afraid of the police and that they should feel safer when they see a police car, but this is what it has come to. As the Kahnawake police chief, Mr. Zacharie, was saying, it all boils down to the approach that is taken. When the police come here, it is to issue fines for traffic violations or to lay charges against people.

Sébastien Lemire: There was some hope that an Anishinabe police force would be set up. An agreement was signed by the Winneway community in 2023 to carry out a feasibility study. According to follow-ups that were conducted recently, in October 2024, on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action number 28, the deliverables have been issued and the Government of Quebec and the federal government want to continue working to implement an Anishinabe police force.

Why is this project not moving forward? Is it a matter of funding or do you think there is more to it than that?

Chief Steeve Mathias: It is not a matter of funding because investments were made in the other two communities, Kebaowek and the Timiskaming first nation. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, two new police stations have been built there and the operating budgets for these two police forces have been tripled or quadrupled. We are very happy for them, because we know that those communities needed police forces to meet their needs, but meanwhile, nothing is happening in Winneway.

As I was saying earlier, what does Winneway have? We were given a small trailer that the police use to stretch their legs and use the washroom, and we are the ones paying to rent that trailer. We do not even have a budget and we do not have an agreement to pay for the expenses related to that trailer. It is unbelievable.

Sébastien Lemire: Your community of Long Point does not officially have a land base in Winneway. How does that affect your capacity to have an independent police force?

Chief Steeve Mathias: With regard to the community's land base, since Winneway does not have reserve status, we began working on the co-operation agreement that you mentioned earlier, which was ratified in June 2022. We agreed on the territory that should be covered and we defined the boundaries of the territory where the police force would have jurisdiction, so we have that.

Even as far as the Department of Public Safety is concerned, we do not need reserve status. As long as we have jurisdiction, that is enough to grant authority to a police force.

Sébastien Lemire: *Meegwetch*.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

We will now go to our second round of questioning. This time it's a five-minute round.

We will begin with Mr. Stevenson.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you.

I'll direct my questions to both of you. You can each have a turn at this.

We've heard testimony that your nations have been pretty much underfunded and are not at the same funding level when it comes to policing as compared with other municipalities. In your talks with other nations, I'm wondering if there is a formula where you can point to examples across the country and say, “These guys are leading by example. They're doing a good job.” It sounds to me like they would all be in the same situation, but I'm wondering if there's some sort of formula where you can say, “This is the minimum standard we need to have proper and effective policing within our area so that we can self-determine our own policing.”

Chief Mathias, I guess we can start with you. What level does it need to brought up to? Do you have other examples of where these guys are doing well and this is what you need to do to get there?

● (1820)

Chief Steeve Mathias: You know, I don't think it will be a one-size-fits-all. I think it has to be self-determined by each first nation in terms of how they want to get themselves organized and how they want to govern and administer the delivery of the policing services.

I'll give you an example. I worked on that feasibility study to create the regional police with the two other Algonquin communities from the region here. We built that feasibility study into the concept of our regional police. We introduced in there the Seven Grandfather Teachings of how we want to govern ourselves with this regional police.

We're introducing cultural relevancy into that. As Mr. Zacharie mentioned earlier, it's building trust. We have to do that. When our approached our people—we made a PowerPoint presentation to our people on how we're going to build our police services and our new stand-alone police service—they really appreciated it. They've now made the link between the relevancy of our culture and the delivery of that service.

William Stevenson: Can you expand on that a little bit? Where do you need to go? What do you need to get there that you're missing at this point?

Chief Steeve Mathias: We need to get the proper means and resources. We need a proper agreement with recurrent funding that is long-term, not just a two-year agreement or so. We need to have some stability to maintain our people working in that department afterwards.

William Stevenson: A five- or 10-year program would definitely give you some stability, then.

Can we go to Mr. Zacharie as well for his input on that?

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: That's a great question.

As a member of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association, I can say we actually did the work already. We've actually provided a copy to Public Safety Canada of the costing and the differences.

We have seen that mainstream policing, for lack of a better term, costs about $250,000 per officer to hire them, train them and do all of that stuff. In first nation policing, when we break down our agreements, sometimes we're getting $150,000 per head, if we're lucky. Why is there a $100,000 difference between officers, when we're doing the same job?

As one of the earlier panellists said, in first nation communities the rate of serious crime is 37% higher. Addiction and suicide...all of those rates are higher in first nation communities. Our officers are doing it by themselves, sometimes with no backup. There are huge differences.

Think about it. If you have a service with 100 officers and there's a $100,000 difference per officer, what's the difference in cost? It's pretty easy. Even if it's 10 officers, it's a $1 million difference in your budget at the end of the day on the bottom line.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): We go now to another five-minute round.

Go ahead, Ms. Lavack.

[*Translation*]

Ginette Lavack: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the three witnesses for being here with us today.

Chief Mathias, my colleague brought up the fact that you have an agreement with Quebec to set up a police force, but that has not yet materialized. Apart from a lack of funding, could you share your thoughts and ideas on the main obstacles that continue to delay the establishment of the police force?

Chief Steeve Mathias: Honestly, when it comes to the pilot project to create a regional police force for the three communities, I don't think it is a matter of funding in our case. I think it's more of a political issue. Quebec told us that if we want a police force or a police station like the other two communities, then we have to agree to reserve status for Winneway.

This is a political game. We have not been able to come to an agreement on all the conditions associated with reserve status for Winneway. We don't agree on the boundaries, and Quebec wants to limit the size of the territory, while we want to maximize it because we are not looking solely at housing needs. We also want to think about economic development and create an economic base for our community.

Thus, there are political issues at play that are preventing us from moving forward with this project. I think that it's unfortunate and dishonest that the government is playing this game and that we are being given an ultimatum to the detriment of public safety in my community. Quebec is asking us to agree to reserve status before it will give us the resources and means to set up our own police station in Winneway. That's blackmail.

● (1825)

Ginette Lavack: Do you have any ideas as to how to break this impasse?

Chief Steeve Mathias: Ms. Lavack, I was hoping that my participation in the committee meeting this evening could be part of the solution and could help us to break the impasse that we are at right now. Otherwise, we could go the legal route. We haven't sought a legal opinion. We haven't had a police force in Winneway for 20 years. That is not just an indigenous right. It's a fundamental right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In our opinion, it's a matter of human rights. Everyone has the right to feel safe where they live, so legal recourse could be a solution.

If not, we will contact the media, programs like *Enquête* or *W5*, and ask them to do a documentary so that we can speak out publicly about how we are being mistreated in Winneway. What have we done to these two governments to deserve being treated differently from the other two communities that have received all kinds of support and resources to increase their community services? I have no idea.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you, Chief Mathias.

Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): You have 30 seconds.

Ginette Lavack: I was going to ask Chief Zacharie if he might talk to us a bit about what lessons the federal government can draw from Quebec's engagement with indigenous policing and how they might inform future legislation.

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: We definitely need to be at the table. We need to be part of the solution. I don't think the government's way of saying “This is how we're going to do it and this is what needs to happen” works. They need to talk to communities. They need to talk to people who are experts in the area of first nations policing. We need to continue those discussions. We haven't had those discussions for a very long time. Even though we have been promised that one day, somewhere down the road, we will be recognized as an essential service, it still hasn't happened. It's been so many years now.

To be honest with you, this feels like another time to talk about the issues that are still plaguing us. I have been the chief peacekeeper for over two decades now and I am still talking about the same issues today that I did over 20 years ago. Yes, some things have improved incrementally, but we're not there yet. There's still a huge gap. There's a huge chasm between what indigenous policing can do and what it will be capable of doing if it's properly resourced.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you so much.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much.

Chief Zacharie, you mentioned earlier doing a costing analysis and sending it on to Public Safety. Is that something you are okay with sharing with the committee?

● (1830)

Chief Dwayne Zacharie: I'm okay with sharing it. I will definitely talk to the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association. I'm sure they are willing to share it.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Perfect. Thank you, Chief.

We have.... Maybe I'll do my inner Terry Sheehan here.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Chair, as a matter of fairness to all political parties, I don't think anyone will object to the Bloc Québécois asking its second set of questions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): You have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Mathias, you sent the members of this committee a brief with an evocative title that talked about how the Canadian and Quebec governments are oppressing the Long Point first nation in Winneway to the detriment of public safety. In that brief, you said that negotiations have been under way with Quebec since 2006, but that Canada has not been at the negotiating table. Why has Canada not been there?

What is more, the Long Point first nation has been refusing to sign an agreement since 2006, even though it submitted key recommendations in good faith. Can you tell us more about that?

Chief Steeve Mathias: Canada just came back to the negotiating table a year and a half ago. It gave us a $300,000 budget to conduct the feasibility study. At the beginning of the most recent negotiations, in 2022, Canada was acting solely as an observer. It did not want to make any decisions. It just wanted to monitor the discussions between the communities and Quebec without getting any more involved than that.

Imagine our surprise when, on Saturday morning, we got an email from the federal and provincial government representatives asking the three chiefs who were involved in this regional project to provide an update on the file and to indicate the communities' position. Why did they make that request? I'm sure it's because they knew that I was appearing before your committee this evening.

Sébastien Lemire: My time is up.

Mr. Mathias, thank you very much for being here. I encourage the committee members to read your brief.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

[*English*]

Chief Steeve Mathias: *Meegwetch*.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Okay. That's perfect.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for your testimony. We deeply appreciate everything you've contributed today.

Unless there is anything else around the table, the committee's willingness to adjourn is heard.

Bob Zimmer: You did a fine job today, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): I would like to say it's a level up from Terry, but I'll leave that up to debate, which we don't have time for.

Thank you, everyone, for your time. We'll see you at the next meeting on Monday.

The meeting is adjourned.