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• (1540)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number nine 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, the committee is continuing its study on indigenous policing and public safety.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses for our first panel.

We have Naiomi Metallic, associate professor and chancellor's chair in aboriginal law and policy, Dalhousie University, by video conference.

We also have, from the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, Beverly Fullerton, minister of health, mental health and addictions; and Brennan Merasty, minister of self-determination and self-government and justice.

We also have David Lamouche, president of the Métis Settlements General Council.

You'll each have five minutes.

Before I go further, I would like to tell you that we have these handy-dandy cards here that give you guidelines for making sure that there's no feedback for our great interpreters over there. We did a sound check for our persons appearing virtually, so we're all set to go.

We will begin with Naiomi for the first five minutes.

Naiomi Metallic (Associate Professor and Chancellor's Chair of Aboriginal Law and Policy, Dalhousie University, As an Individual): Thank you very much. Good afternoon.

Thank you very much for the invitation.

I am glad the committee is undertaking this study, but I also want to express significant frustration at the holdup of any meaningful action on indigenous policing.

In light of all that has come before, including several reports that have touched on indigenous policing, like the Council of Canadian Academies report, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report and the Viens report, as well as

various recent reports on policing by the RCMP more generally, including the Bastarache report and the Mass Casualty Commission report, it's really troubling how little progress there has been on these issues.

First, I'll provide my background. In addition to being a professor, my master's work focused on chronicling the underfunding of essential services to first nations in particular. I have focused on this from the perspective of child welfare, indigenous policing and other areas as well. I've been an expert witness for the MMIWG inquiry, speaking about this issue of chronic underfunding but also framing it as an interjurisdictional neglect issue where both the federal and provincial governments are neglecting their obligations.

I was a member of the CCA report on indigenous policing, and I believe you have one of my committee members, Mylène Jaccoud, appearing before you later; she was also on that committee.

I authored a report on first nations bylaws and their lack of enforcement. That report has now been downloaded over 10,000 times. It looked at the issue of non-enforcement of bylaws by RCMP and other police officers and getting to the root of what the problems were.

I've also been involved in the intervention of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Pekuakamiulnuatsh case, which was about policing in first nations communities and a challenge based on the honour of the Crown. I've been involved in supporting first nations in the Maritimes on justice and the first nations policing program issues.

My key message here is that we need to do things differently. Canadian law has not created safety and order for indigenous peoples; it has been disordering and has resulted in massive overrepresentation in both the criminal justice and child welfare systems.

Of course, there is a link between the harmful effects of substantive criminal and child welfare laws and policing. The status quo has been to impose mainstream policing on indigenous peoples with all its ill consequences. Even where there has been some effort to accommodate, such as through the FNPP, it's woefully inadequate, under-serviced and underfunded, and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has affirmed that.

Space has to be made for indigenous peoples to come up with their own solutions in this area, and this essential service has to be adequately funded.

The first thing I want to do is review some of the key problems and gaps in the FNPP we identified in the CCA report. You may know that it only offers two options: self-administering policing agreements or community tripartite agreements. Only two-thirds of indigenous peoples in Canada have access to the FNPP. That is one thing we found. The remaining 200-plus communities are under policing provided in the province or region. Métis and urban and off-reserve peoples are not eligible for the FNPP. The FNPP has been closed since the 1990s, such that no one is able to get into it. If you're in, you're grandfathered in, but there can be no new communities. In Nova Scotia, where I am, there are eight communities not covered by the FNPP.

Of the 457 participating communities in the FNPP, only a third are policed by self-administered policing agreements, and the rest are through community tripartite agreements, CTAs. They're supposed to be used to enhance services in communities, but we've found they're often used to provide baseline services, and often in ways that are not sufficient given the challenges faced by many indigenous communities.

• (1545)

Initially, there was quite a high number of indigenous police officers who were hired through the FNPP. Those numbers have decreased dramatically over the last 30 or 40 years. CTAs used to be 94% indigenous police officers; they were 25% when we did our study back in 2019—

The Chair: Naomi, thank you very much for that. You're at five minutes. You'll be able to provide more input during the question portion.

Naomi Metallic: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, please.

Brennan Merasty (Minister of Self Determination and Self Government and Justice, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan): [*Witness spoke in Michif*]

[*English*]

Good afternoon, esteemed members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today on a critical issue affecting Métis people in Saskatchewan.

As mentioned earlier, my name is Brennan Merasty. I am the elected regional representative for northern region 3 and the minister for self-government and self-determination and justice for the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan.

As an elected representative of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, the national government of Saskatchewan's Métis people, it is with honour and a sense of urgency that I stand before you today.

I will start by saying, based on my 25 years of lived experience, that institutional concepts will not heal our people. It is discovering our spirit through identity, culture, values and language that will carry us forward. It will ground us. It will give us the balance that we need in everyday life, and more importantly, a connection with purpose. Then we can say [*Witness spoke in Michif*].

On August 21, the MN-S government declared a state of emergency on alcohol, drugs, gangs and violence that was devastating Métis communities across Saskatchewan. This decision was not taken lightly. It comes against the backdrop of systemic, long-standing barriers to accessing critical community care, services and support that our community members require to address their mental health and addictions needs.

Without immediate, coordinated action, more lives will be lost and more families will continue to be impacted. This resolution empowers the MN-S government to engage with the province and Canada to provide resources that support community-led initiatives to help address the emergency and establish culturally grounded solutions to curtail addictions and violence in Saskatchewan.

In addition to being caught in a jurisdictional gap, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan is caught in a funding gap that needs to be addressed in order to best support Métis citizens across the province.

With that, I'll pass the floor to my co-witness, our minister for health, mental health and addictions, Minister Beverly Fullerton.

• (1550)

Beverly Fullerton (Minister of Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan): Good afternoon.

As Minister Merasty mentioned, I am the minister of health, mental health and addictions. I am also the elected regional representative for western region 2A of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan.

Despite the jurisdictional and funding gaps, we are responding, developing partnerships with our locals, our municipalities, the province, the RCMP, Saskatchewan Marshals Service and other partners to think outside the box for ways to support our communities as they face multiple crises at the same time.

One component of how we plan to address the state of emergency is to establish a Métis-led community safety officer program in Saskatchewan, also known as a CSO, with Métis Nation as the lead agency. CSO status with the province will provide us with the capabilities to best serve our communities and support our citizens.

This is only one component of how Métis Nation-Saskatchewan is responding to the state of emergency on drugs, gangs and violence in our communities. MN-S provides several programs and services for our citizens and works with other community organizations to best support citizens throughout the province.

Long term, a distinct Métis-led, culturally grounded framework, designed to help our communities facing increased gang activity, drugs and violence, is imperative to ensure that our communities can grow and prosper. Addiction, mental health and community violence do not wait for federal budget cycles or parliamentary studies. They demand urgent action now.

Métis Nation-Saskatchewan has put forward a concrete plan of action and a clear vision for the betterment of our communities. What we need now is for the federal and provincial governments to stand with us, not just with words but with funding, collaboration and urgency.

Marsee. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have the Metis Settlements General Council.

Dave, you have five minutes.

Dave Lamouche (President, Metis Settlements General Council): Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair, and honourable members.

Kinanaskomitinawaw.

Thank you for inviting me, as president of the Metis Settlements General Council, to represent all settlements in Alberta, the only constitutionally recognized Métis land base in Canada.

We are self-governing communities responsible for 1.25 million acres of land and approximately 10,000 people. For nearly a century, we have governed ourselves, built our own institutions and worked to keep one another and our guests safe.

Across our settlements, public safety is in crisis. Between 2022 and 2025 calls for service because of crimes in our areas rose. Behind those crimes are grieving families and vulnerable people exposed to drugs and violence. People are afraid.

We hear the same story in every settlement. The RCMP presence is inconsistent. Local bylaws are ignored. Officers who build trust are transferred away. Response times are too long. Systemic racism remains. Restorative justice needs to be fostered.

If I had to name one thing that would change everything, it's a strong visible police presence. Presence creates understanding, builds respects and turns officers in uniform from strangers to neighbours. Without presence, trust fades. Without trust, safety disappears.

Our settlements have community bylaws to protect families and to remove drug dealers, yet no one is there to enforce them. Our people ask, if these are our laws, why don't they matter? The question echoes what this committee concluded in 2021: the lack of enforcement undermines indigenous self-government and community safety.

Four years later, that gap remains.

Many officers want to serve but high turnover, limited resources and lack of Metis Settlements-specific training make meaningful presence impossible. At our July 2025 policing workshop with the

RCMP, Alberta sheriffs and Lakeshore Regional Police, we identified four priorities.

The first is local control and accountability: develop a Metis Settlements police service model with our RCMP and the Alberta sheriff partners with MSGC and settlement representation.

The second is stability and cultural competence: require multi-year postings, stay in the community longer and have Metis Settlements-specific training in history, culture and language for officers serving in our communities.

The third is joint training and operational capacity: partner with other police services on integrated community safety teams and shared training to raise standards for all.

The fourth is equitable investment: recognize Metis Settlement policing as an essential service, funded sustainably, not through one-time studies or short-term projects.

Presence is prevention. When officers are visible, crime drops, families feel safer and communities begin to trust again. When communities feel safe, they grow. Safety and community economic development are inseparable: businesses stay open longer, visitors come to see our culture and our lakes, and investment follows stability. Right now, that stability is what's missing. In some settlements, we haven't seen our assigned officer in months. That absence tells our people that safety is conditional and crime can flourish unchecked.

The Metis Settlements have proven we can govern our lands, deliver services and build institutions that work. Now we need Canada's and Alberta's partnership to do the same for policing.

We ask the Government of Canada to work with Alberta and MSGC to co-design a Metis-Settlements-led policing framework with a presence in each community, with central coordination and support; to fund training and operational capacity beginning in 2026; to clarify enforcement authority so RCMP and sheriffs can uphold settlement bylaws during transition; and to ensure Metis Settlements policing is recognized, respected and resourced as part of Canada's public safety system.

Policing is about more than enforcement. It's about belonging, dignity and trust.

• (1555)

Presence builds trust, trust builds safety and safety builds opportunity. Let's move from reports to results so that the next time this committee meets on indigenous policing, it can point to the Metis Settlements as proof that we finally got it right.

Thank you. *Kinanaskomitinawaw*.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the question and answer round for six minutes.

Jamie.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing on this very important topic.

President Lamouche, maybe I'll start with you. You talked about your community being in crisis. You mentioned that there are issues with gangs, and that violent crime is on the rise. You mentioned a few other things in your opening remarks.

With regard to the ongoing crisis, is it a new batch of criminals that keeps coming to your land? Is it the same people reoffending over and over again after being released on bail? Paint me a picture here, please.

Dave Lamouche: Times have changed recently. There's more and more of a gang presence in the community. They're recruiting children and youth. They're using children for mules. In fact, we have a stat in our community where an eight-year-old took some drugs to school. They were trying to push drugs to students there.

That's just one part. We see more and more violence against elders and more and more violence against youth and women as well. We see trap houses. It's just rampant. It's crazy. I mean, it's something that you would see on TV. Now we're seeing it at home.

Jamie Schmale: Would it be fair to say that, in your opinion, the ability for police to do their jobs properly in terms of arresting an individual—the fact that they may not get out on bail automatically and that if they are eventually convicted they might actually see some jail time—could be a piece as well as what you're talking about?

Dave Lamouche: Yes. It's police presence and enforcement. Repeat offenders need to be incarcerated. It's always the same bad actors. It's like a revolving door. We need that stopped. Something has to change. I think the system needs to change.

• (1600)

Jamie Schmale: I'll turn now to the two ministers from Saskatchewan. I don't know who wants to answer, but I noticed that both of you were nodding your head during that question and answer.

The floor is yours.

Brennan Merasty: Thank you, Vice-Chair and committee.

For me, with 25 years of lived experience, enforcement and restriction and being backed into the corner didn't do me any good. It

caused push-back. It caused anger. It caused more damage than anything.

In northern Saskatchewan, you see the violent crime rates. You see the drugs and the addictions all running rampant. Suicide rates are higher in the north than they are in the south. Why? It's because our people need to be nurtured to do something different.

Again, institutional concepts don't work. Residential schools didn't work for our people. They don't work. Jail systems don't work. People are still doing drugs. They're still part of the drug trade when they are incarcerated.

Instead of coming to enforce us and back us into corners, reach out. Nurture us. Walk with us to do something different. That's what we need to do. That's what changed my life after 25 years of lived experience with drugs and addiction. It's not institutional concepts, ladies and gentlemen. It's doing something different. The cycle continues if you keep incarcerating our people.

We need to change. We need to do it differently. That is thinking outside the box. At the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan justice ministry we've made a submission for approximately \$15 million to have community safety officers, because we want them to come into the community. Again, it's not to enforce. It's to help walk beside our people, to nurture us to do something different.

Beverly Fullerton: Having lived experience and being at these tables knowing that what works for me might not work for the next person beside me, we do see that there is a big change in the gang activity and the drugs. The drugs that have now increased so badly, like the crystal meth and the fentanyl, are drugs that weren't as prominent as they were five years ago. We see the increase in addiction, the displacement of our families, our people being incarcerated and the overrepresentation. We know that there are cycles that are not being broken, so being Métis, when we go into incarceration or into these systems, we are always known as the forgotten people. We lack the programs and services specific to our Métis. We are all over the province; we're not just one small community in Saskatchewan.

How are we addressing the needs specifically to that person and not just putting them in a box and checking the box, saying they're a lost cause? I've heard, "Oh, they're too far gone." We have the tools to work with our communities to meet them where they're at, walk along with them and change those cycles. We have so many moms who deserve that opportunity.

I don't believe continuing with the overrepresentation in incarceration is going to fix anything.

Jamie Schmale: You mentioned you saw the sudden spike five years ago. I should point out that Bill C-75, a piece of Liberal legislation that allowed bail to become almost automatic for those being arrested, passed in 2019, so right around the time it filtered through the system and took effect would be around the same time that you're pointing out there was a spike in gang and drug activity.

Beverly Fullerton: Absolutely.

The Chair: That's your six minutes. Thank you.

Next we have Jaime for six minutes, please.

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

I'm going to direct my first questions to Professor Metallic. She was talking about how we need to create space for more indigenous police officers. She had noted, before she ran out of time, that the indigenous police force, especially Mi'kmaq police enforcing Mi'kmaq communities, in her words, has decreased dramatically over the past 20 years. We've had other witnesses who have said the same thing.

I'm wondering if you could speak to how we can fix that problem. I note that you went to the indigenous Blacks and Mi'kmaq initiative program out of Dalhousie that ensures a certain number of spots for law school are for Mi'kmaq, indigenous and Black people.

Do we need a similar program with the federal RCMP to ensure that there are mandatory spots for indigenous people?

Naiomi Metallic: I think there need to be options on the table more than just CTAs and self-administered policing. There should be peacekeepers and special constables. It's the right to self-determination, so it should be solutions that work for communities based on what they're looking for. I think that has to be a big part of it.

Funding is a massive issue that has been raised by the other panellists, but there's the continuing underfunding of programs, so that's a huge issue. Coming to the RCMP and some of the things that need to happen there, there's a long history of distrust of the RCMP. They can't be the only option, but, of course, in some cases they're going to be the default.

To come back to your question, the recruitment and retention of indigenous police officers needs to be a real priority for the RCMP. I also think there are other policy issues that should be addressed that have been consistent barriers, and they've been named by various reports, including the requirement to serve anywhere in the RCMP and the requirement to only serve somewhere for three years. Those don't work for indigenous police officers. It's a disincentive to choose to serve in that case. There really should be priority given to placing indigenous officers within indigenous communities and not imposing that time limit so that they can only serve for three years. That also prevents non-indigenous officers from gaining the cultural competency they so desperately need in order to serve in these communities.

Yes, to answer your question, those are big priority areas, but we should be looking at not just the RCMP but also at self-determination.

• (1605)

Jaime Battiste: Can you go further along that train of thought? If it's not just the RCMP, what kinds of targets should we be setting? We're relying on experts to give us recommendations at this committee to make to the federal government.

What numbers are we looking at nationally that we need to start setting a target for? Are we looking at 100 or 200 trained indigenous officers? What do you think is the proper number that we should be aiming for over the next four years?

Naiomi Metallic: I'm afraid I don't have those numbers on hand in terms of what they were in 2019 when we looked at them.

However, I will say that RCMP are part of the solution, but we should also be looking at having special constables, peace officers and officers. I see that a previous person mentioned safety officers. We need to look at that as part of that answer as well.

Yes, there need to be far more RCMP officers. I'm sorry. I don't have specific numbers, but it has to be a significant increase. When they went from 86 to 59 and self-administered, and 94 to 25, that speaks to some of those numbers. I can take a look and see if I can find that number in the book here.

Jaime Battiste: Just thinking outside the box, I hear a lot about recruitment and retention, but I've also heard a lot about trying to figure out ways outside of the RCMP. Do you think indigenous people or first nations people should have their own institutions that are graduating policemen who are trained through them?

Naiomi Metallic: Absolutely, yes, in arguing for self-determination, that can include our own indigenous police forces, maybe through CTAs, if they continue to want to have the RCMP, or the other alternatives that I mentioned.

There has been a lot of criticism from different reports that the paramilitary-style training at depot for six months isn't sufficient. It's not giving people the skills they really need to offer in this day and age. I think specific indigenous training for people who are going to work in first nations communities and indigenous officers would be fantastic, and it's desperately needed.

I do believe that in Manitoba, now, there is actually specific training for self-administered first nations officers being offered.

Jaime Battiste: Brennan, you seem to be in agreement. Do you think we need our own indigenous policing training in Canada, as opposed to what is offered at the RCMP depot?

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

Brennan Merasty: I definitely do. That's one of the distinction-based focus and planning...that our working group is doing, alongside the RCMP in Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Marshals. It's part of our conversation, along with reintegration and safe spaces; but cultural components definitely have to be part of the solution.

Thank you.

Jaime Battiste: Do you think that the—

The Chair: That's six minutes.

Jaime Battiste: Just quickly, do you think the First Nations University, since it's already in Regina, could play a role in some kind of hybrid offering?

• (1610)

Brennan Merasty: Yes, definitely.

The Chair: That's all we needed, thank you.

[Translation]

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

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

Ms. Metallic, first of all, congratulations on your work. In your opening remarks, you mentioned important commissions of inquiry for Quebec, and I appreciate that.

In 2020, the federal government expressed its intention to recognize first nations policing as an essential service through legislation. However, as you pointed out, the discussion paper released in 2024 by former minister of public safety Dominic LeBlanc seems to be moving away from that commitment.

What do you think explains this decline? What concrete steps should the federal government take to ensure that this future legislation truly recognizes indigenous policing as an essential service?

[English]

Naiomi Metallic: Thank you for the question. I hope you don't mind if I answer in English.

Yes, it seems that the proposed legislation hit a brick wall, but it was fundamentally flawed. The draft only seemed to kind of use the first nations policing program as its template. It was only for first nations, I believe—and I might be wrong on that—and only self-administered policing services were available. It was silent on funding.

That's kind of baffling, given that by this point the Supreme Court of Canada had said, in Bill C-92—in a reference to the act involving child welfare in first nations and indigenous communities—that this type of act recognizing a right to self-determination and self-government, and setting out a framework for its exercise, was totally constitutional and an act of legislative reconciliation.

That baffles me, as well as the fact that such legislation would be consistent with UNDRIP and the right to self-determination and self-government.

I don't know why the government has completely let this drop. I think they certainly should be returning to this and actually having mechanisms in there to ensure adequate funding as well. It's self-determination, but there also has to be adequate funding.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I imagine you're aware that the Minister of Public Safety, Mr. Anandasangaree, will be testifying before our committee on Wednesday. What questions would you like us to ask him?

[English]

Naiomi Metallic: In light of the commitments, the legislation and the two recent cases—one from the Supreme Court of Canada saying that Canada breached the honour of the Crown around the first nations policing program and the human rights decision—what is Canada going to do differently in light of all of these recent developments?

• (1615)

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Quickly, what answer do you expect if we ask him that question?

Naiomi Metallic: I don't know what his answer will be, but I hope he will tell you that the government is going to do something fairly quickly. We'll see.

Sébastien Lemire: *Meegwetch.* Thank you for answering my question in French.

Some argue that indigenous policing shouldn't simply replicate provincial models or those of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but should instead draw on indigenous legal traditions and community priorities. What do you think a true indigenous policing governance model would look like? What legal or constitutional changes would be necessary to make this model a reality?

[English]

Naiomi Metallic: I think that's for me still, so I will answer in English.

I think it has to be open, and that's what we recommended in our CCA report. Communities may want to continue to use existing police services, but they may want to try something completely different. There are peacekeeper models and special constable models where you have someone who works as a sort of go-between, and there are safety officers.

It has to be flexible; that's the main point. It has to be flexible for whatever works for communities to meet them where they are, because, as some of the earlier panellists were saying, we're dealing with the impacts of colonialism, rising drug issues and, I think, crime issues that are rising across Canada, so people need a tool box that is flexible in order to address their specific issues.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Ms. Metallic, in Quebec, the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Quebec, also known as the Viens commission, recommended that indigenous policing services be recognized as essential services in Quebec legislation. The same request exists at the federal level.

Why do you think it's so difficult for governments to recognize indigenous policing as an essential service when there seem to be several recommendations along those lines?

[English]

Naïomi Metallic: There's such resistance, and it all comes down to funding and political will around funding. My hero, Cindy Blackstock, has a great saying, "Discrimination is when the government doesn't think you're worth the money." I really think that is a massive piece of the resistance to the legislation that was proposed and to actually recognizing policing as an essential service. No other policing service in Canada has to go, cap in hand, every year or two based on their contract to ask for more money to maintain their policing service. It's outrageous.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Given Quebec's specific jurisdiction over public safety and Quebec's relationship with indigenous nations, what role should the federal government play to better align its funding and meet its legal commitments without encroaching on provincial autonomy or unduly downloading costs to the provinces?

[English]

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

Naïomi Metallic: They both have responsibilities, and I think they include working together on Jordan's principle, which is a concept developed in child welfare. It's about everyone co-operating in harmony and seeing a role for each, and that's supported by the Supreme Court as well.

[Translation]

Thank you.

Sébastien Lemire: *Meegwetch.*

[English]

The Chair: Going to our second round, we have William for five minutes, please.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you.

I'm going to stay with Ms. Metallic for the first part of my question.

You stated a bunch of different statistics about 457 communities, and you said about a third of them were self-policing. Can you tell me in those studies whether there's a difference in funding when they're self-policing and whether that structure is woefully underfunded because of the manpower, or is it just overall budgets that are different when you look at that versus the ones that use joint policing?

Naïomi Metallic: That's the CTA, which involves more officers from the RCMP, so there's an existing infrastructure. When you are doing self-administered policing, you are creating the infrastructure; there's a board, and there has to be staff. You're essentially creating that infrastructure.

It can cost more, and at times it has been a challenge.

However, I think that there are probably creative ways to look at how it can be done with economies of scale, perhaps looking at several first nations in Manitoba—

• (1620)

William Stevenson: I guess it's not so much the cost per each one. What I'm looking at is the government funding, Ottawa's funding.

Do they actually fund them on a per capita basis, or are they funding them just by the difference in their model and saying that they're going to send so many RCMP, versus giving you x dollars to have your own funding for self-policing?

Naïomi Metallic: I think I'm getting your question.

There are agreements, and the agreements set out the various aspects—capital costs, staff costs and these sorts of things—that will be covered under self-administered policing.

When the issue came to a Supreme Court of Canada case last year in 2024, involving a self-administered group from Quebec, it was found that consistently they came and said that what you're providing to us is not enough. It was split 60-40 between Canada and Quebec—I think that's right—and they consistently asked for increases, because it wasn't actually at cost.

There's a formula that Canada uses. I don't know what's behind the formula, but I know that first nations under self-administered policing have consistently said that it's not enough. The Supreme Court has said—

William Stevenson: Where I'm going with this is that we've heard multiple different witnesses talk about having to change the model so as not to be institutional with the RCMP and to have more culturally appropriate justice. What I was getting at was whether those who are on self-policing have the flexibility to use their funding to look at preventive measures when they want to go forward. Would they be able to change how they use their funding so that they could have flexibility in their model, or is it only barely just keeping up with staff members and hard costs and that sort of thing?

Naïomi Metallic: As far as I understand it, there is no flexibility in the self-administered model. They have to follow provincial standards all across the board. There's underfunding, and they're typically using it just to keep the lights on.

The Supreme Court of Canada case is a great overview of the problems that were faced by that particular community.

William Stevenson: Mr. Lamouche, you talked about how presence is prevention and presence builds trust. Going forward, what do you suggest in changing some of the model so that it's not always reactive but actually preventive and has some sort of structure so that they're not having people go through the system afterwards, after the crimes?

Dave Lamouche: First of all, I think it's providing the service of presence. Having more presence in our communities would maybe not stifle it completely, but I think it would probably narrow the amount of criminal activity that happens in the community.

There's also opportunity for the police to work with, say, social services or other family and resource networks to deal with crime, with youth, through more prevention programs and more involvement in social development types of activities.

Also, if we instill restorative justice, you could prevent a lot of incarceration by having local jurisdictions deal with matters at the very beginning stages of—

The Chair: Thank you, Dave. We're going to move to the next questioner.

Brendan, you have five minutes, please.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks, everyone, for the excellent testimony and for being here.

I want to start with something that my friend Mr. Schmale mentioned, the passing of Bill C-75 in 2019, and associating that with gang infiltration into communities while reminding everyone that association is not causation.

That bill did introduce an aspect that was intended to require judges to give particular attention to the circumstances of individual and vulnerable accused.

Minister Merasty, I heard you talking a lot about not imposing institutional solutions on Métis or other indigenous communities. When you're addressing violence, addictions and suicide in communities, as you talked about—in fact, your nation declared an emergency in August—how do you begin to address the complexity of what's happening in the community?

That's recognizing, of course, that gang infiltration is widespread. It's malignant. It should concern us all.

On the other hand, we can't just put everyone in jail.

• (1625)

Brennan Merasty: Indigenous means all Métis and first nations. We need to be a part of the conversation and the led initiatives that are doing things differently and outside of the box.

Times have changed, but the cycles continue. The cycles continue, for example, in northern Saskatchewan, where the rates of crimes and suicides are seven times greater than those in southern Saskatchewan. Although the south is still dealing with the same issues, they are greater in the isolated communities of northern Saskatchewan. We need to do something different. Incarceration does not work, because you are boxing our people in. Institutional concepts don't work.

Our working group is thinking outside the box. We are looking and exploring with members of the RCMP through their many years of experience and others with lived experience to see how we can reintegrate our people back into the community. You can't just put them in another house, where the cycle continues. We need safe spaces and supportive living so that they can be nurtured to do things differently and get greater outcomes.

I changed my life, after 25 years, by being in a safe space. My wife and kids are back with me. Six people in our community now have an outcome different from what society expects of us.

Thank you.

Brendan Hanley: That's amazing. Thank you.

Minister Fullerton, do you have anything to add to that? I saw you nodding.

Beverly Fullerton: It is all a bigger issue. If we don't have prevention and we're not meeting them before an intervention and then in the follow-up and the aftercare....

I want to make it very clear that currently, there is absolutely no funding for Métis-specific policing. Tiny grants here or there are not sustainable for our people.

This current system continues to be a conduit into the foster care and justice systems. The lack of supports and intervention mechanisms pre- and post-incarceration and the lack of foster care supports for those aging out of the system often lead to involvement in the justice system and recidivism, furthering the need for additional policing and public safety officers.

What we're seeing is that we can fill the prisons very easily, but where are they going when they're released? What are we doing for our folks to help prevent them from getting into drugs and crime and joining the gangs?

We look at the gangs. Yes, they're very violent. Also, those are families. There are intergenerational gang members now. We have great-kokums with their great-grandchildren in a gang.

It's a larger issue. It's where these systems actually need to start intertwining and working together so that we can have these preventive measures and not just be siloing it, because then we're not going to address all of the issues of the bigger picture.

Brendan Hanley: Thank you. I know the analysts are noting your points very closely, so thank you for that.

Professor Metallic, I'm still grappling with your figures on the dramatic decrease in indigenous police officers over the years, from 90% to only 25%. That's quite astounding.

Obviously you point out the lack of resources and the lack of recognition of policing as an essential service, but can you dig into that a little bit? How do we restore that number?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, please.

Naiomi Metallic: It includes remuneration not being at the same level and people then getting scooped up by others, such as the RCMP or municipal services. Being underserved means that people face more risks on the job or have to do more on the job than comparable officers. Those are some of the things. They're outlined in the CCA report. I recommend taking a look at that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Sébastien, for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Metallic, you pointed out that the funding split, where 52% comes from the federal government and 48%, from the provinces, often leads to a race to the bottom. The total amount depends on which government contributes the least.

Why do you think both levels of government continue to provide insufficient funding when there is long-standing evidence of inequity? What mechanisms would help to ensure more stable, predictable and equitable funding over the long term?

[English]

Naiomi Metallic: I think it goes back to my previous answer. Both are trying to fund us as little as possible. The disagreements on constitutional issues over who has responsibility lead both to do less, and I think you're right in suggesting it's a bit of a race to the bottom. Funding has to be based on adequate services and actually funding at cost, as opposed to basing the funding on formulas that are essentially arbitrary.

Also, I think there needs to be oversight. I think the Nishnawbe Aski recently got into the Ontario legislation. There's a mechanism there for funding disputes to be addressed in a proper independent way. I think mechanisms are needed to ensure that those contracts are being negotiated fairly. There's recent guidance from the Supreme Court about how to negotiate them fairly. I think those are all good mechanisms that are helpful.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: In fact, there's an imbalance there as well. Funding for the police is a source of imbalance, but funding for the courts is also a source of imbalance. In many cases, it seems that first nations, to be heard, have to go to court.

What impact does that have on the application of justice?

[English]

Naiomi Metallic: That's a great question.

There's been a human rights decision for one community, but we know it's the same in all communities. Why do we have to keep going to court to prove something? Why isn't Canada proactive in addressing this, instead of first nations having to go to court each time? We know it's the same issue across the board.

I think that's an excellent question, and we do see that. Really, they should be acting proactively.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: It's often said that the government imposes its conditions.

How can we encourage negotiation instead of having conditions imposed by a government, especially when we feel that the federal government has no interest in recognizing indigenous police forces?

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please.

Naiomi Metallic: The Supreme Court has tried to assist us by giving a list of what the government can't do. They said so with Quebec in the recent case: They can't be intransigent, must go with

an open mind to the table, engage in genuine negotiations and not attempt to coerce or unilaterally impose an outcome.

I think that is really key guidance. The Supreme Court says that if you don't do that, you're breaching the honour of the Crown and are liable for damages if that's the case.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Sébastien Lemire: *Kitchi meegwetch.*

[English]

The Chair: *Meegwetch.* Thank you.

We have Billy Morin now, for five minutes.

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

We've heard today—and of course we know, as public servants—that the first nations and Inuit policing program is obviously missing the Métis aspect.

My first question is for President Lamouche.

You're unique in that you have the only legislative land base of Métis communities across Canada, and a significant amount of Alberta is covered by your jurisdiction. Can you expand upon comparatives in regard to the land base that you have? Also, how does not being in the first nations and Inuit policing program affect your communities when it comes to protecting them with safety?

Dave Lamouche: Just to put it into context, from my comments today, our land base is equivalent to that of Prince Edward Island, and we have roughly about 6% of P.E.I.'s population. P.E.I. has a population of roughly around 183,000 people.

P.E.I. has approximately 225 RCMP officers, plus three municipal forces in Charlottetown, Summerside and Kensington. Kensington has a chief, a deputy chief, four constables and four casual constables for a community of around 1,500 people near Cavendish. Charlottetown and Summerside would likely have larger forces.

We assume total police presence in P.E.I. would be around 250 personnel. With that basic math, our settlement should have at least 15 or 16 dedicated police members, with two per settlement as a minimum. Some of our settlements are similar in population to Kensington.

In reality, we can see a future in which every settlement has a dedicated force of four to five officers who work alongside social services. Team members would ensure a full spectrum of support available to the people we serve.

Billy Morin: Thank you, President Lamouche.

To our two ministers, I have a similar question.

Right now you are working towards self-government agreements and self-determination. As mentioned, you're left out of the first nations and Inuit policing program. What are the consequences of that exclusion, and what role do you see INAN, ISC or the powers that be in CIRNAC playing in how that evolves?

Brennan Merasty: The consequences are higher rates in crime, violence, suicides and people being lost and disconnected from the realities of everyday life.

There are funding programs for first nations, as stated, but there's nothing for Métis, so we have to be creative and strategic and find ways to partner and make sure that our Métis-led initiatives are a part of the conversation. We continue to do that with our partners in the RCMP, from indigenous police servicing right down to the community and the marshals now in Saskatchewan.

As stated earlier, we do have some submissions in with Canada for funding of our Métis-led initiatives to deal with the drugs, gangs and violence, and we're hoping for good results there.

● (1635)

Billy Morin: Thank you, Minister.

To go back to President Lamouche, your communities are unique with the land base. You're next to first nations, you're next to rural municipalities and you're next to small municipalities in Alberta.

Over the last number of weeks in this committee, we've heard different models. I've heard from the ministers and you, and from Ms. Metallic as well, that there's no one size that fits all and that every community is a little unique, but can you just elaborate and expand upon your situation with the settlements? Are you open to collaboration with the province? Are you open to collaboration with first nations? Are you open to collaboration with the municipalities?

One good line I heard here is, of course, that jurisdiction comes into an issue, and I think the government plays that card a little bit too much to stop things, but another indigenous leader told me that money shouldn't even matter; we have to protect lives and protect people.

Talk to me about the collaboration you see, going forward.

Dave Lamouche: We've been doing a lot of work within our eight Métis settlements. Just recently, we had a conference here with the RCMP, with the Alberta sheriffs, with Lakeshore policing—which is indigenous-led—and the Métis Settlements, looking for models and ways to address providing the service. We're looking at a model that we would be centrally operating within our government at MSGC.

The settlements are spread right across Alberta. We were thinking of having collaboration with both the RCMP and Alberta in the settlements and working collaboratively in each settlement to have a presence there and have either satellite services or detachments that operate within those eight settlements. Each settlement would have its own little jurisdiction, although under one jurisdiction, but there would be different areas.

The Chair: Thanks, Dave. I appreciate that.

Now we go to Ginette for the final question and answer period.

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for being here today and for sharing your important testimony. We are happy to have you with us.

My first question is to Minister Merasty and Minister Fullerton.

As you know, the federal government has already undertaken steps to address the crisis of gang-related crimes and illicit drugs within indigenous communities, including initiatives such as the Canada border strategy and Bill C-12.

Drawing on your own personal experiences and work with the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, how do you see the collaboration among the federal government, indigenous police services and community organizations being strengthened so that they can be more effective on the ground?

● (1640)

Beverly Fullerton: That's a great question.

Métis Nation-Saskatchewan represents over 40,000 registered Métis citizens, and those numbers will be even higher once we get them registered.

When the Métis are not recognized in the committees or in the funding or by having those voices at the table, it puts us where our hands are almost tied to move further to bring in the programs and services that we know our citizens would need.

Right now, when we see Métis not being recognized, such as at this committee, we go back to the communities. We have other non-profit organizations or frontline folks addressing these issues, and they're all competing for the same pot of funding instead of being able to come together collaboratively and enhance those small dollars and make them larger.

What we do at Métis Nation-Saskatchewan is work very hard every single day, building the relationships with the other first nations in our other communities, our urban communities. If you look at our northern communities, what you'll find is that a lot of those communities have only one road in and one road out, and they're mixed. We have non-indigenous and we have first nations, but we have a lot of Métis, so when we're addressing the gang strategies, we need to be very community-focused. What's happening in La Loche gang activity is going to be different from what's happening in Regina gang activity or what's happening in British Columbia, so we can't have that one-size-fits-all response in the way we address these issues.

We have a lot of intergenerational trauma, and we know that if we have that access and we are working alongside our RCMP and we're bringing in that culturally specific Métis training in partnerships, that is when we're going to start seeing some change in our communities when the healing comes there.

Brennan Merasty: As my colleague stated, we represent over 40,000 Métis in Saskatchewan. With the self-government agreements to date and the funding mechanisms put in place for Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, there is over \$80 million for post-secondary education. Tens of thousands of Métis citizens are now having different outcomes. We are contributing to society. We are part of it. We have found a purpose. We are doing real things.

The \$22 million in early learning and child care programs—and it's probably greater now—has impacted over 32,000 Métis families for better outcomes through better supports. The money and the funding streams currently in place change our outcomes. That's what we need here, but for all Métis and first nations.

We are having those conversations with leadership. It's not just Métis; it's all Métis and first nations.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you very much.

Ms. Metallic, we've already discussed the models and how there are a lot of different options that should be on the table, and the flexibility, whether that be peacekeeping forces or what have you. There are many things to consider.

Could you go into a little further detail with respect to the kind of accountability mechanism that should be in place? We have discussed funding. Are there any reports—the CCA report, for example, or others—that give some sense of what the required level of funding really is? What are we talking about in terms of an accountability structure, and what would be better scenarios?

Naiomi Metallic: In terms of what the funding models would look like, first of all, the starting place would be taking a look at the levels that are received by non-first nations police forces. Substantive equality is not just getting us up to that level; it can be above that if there is need, based on geography, historical impact and other factors as well.

I am pulling that from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society case on child welfare, but the parallels are so significant in terms of policing. You would look to those factors, I think, and there really needs to be some oversight and models to monitor this and how it's going.

I wrote a report for Cindy Blackstock in child welfare, but it went broader in saying that currently there are no ombuds or accountability mechanisms to look at the services that are provided, either by ISC or as a public service, as they relate to policing services for indigenous folks. I think that would be really important as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end of our first panel.

Thank you to all our presenters for the excellent testimony and for being with us today.

We'll suspend while we get the next group up.

- (1640) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1645)

The Chair: On our next panel, we have Mylène Jaccoud, professor, school of criminology, Université de Montréal, who is appearing as an individual.

We have, from the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, Andrea Sandmaier and Garrett Tomlinson.

Welcome to our guests. Each group has five minutes to present.

Please go ahead. Thank you.

Andrea Sandmaier (President, Otipemisiwak Métis Government): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to appear before you today.

My name is Andrea Sandmaier, and I am the president of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, the democratically elected government representing over 73,000 Métis citizens across Alberta. The word “Otipemisiwak” means “the people who govern themselves”.

The Otipemisiwak Métis Government is the oldest continuous Métis government in Canada. We have our own constitution, which came into force in 2022, creating a fair, transparent and accountable system of governance rooted in Métis laws, values and traditions.

In 2019, Canada and the Métis nation within Alberta, now the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, signed the Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement. In 2023, we signed our self-government implementation agreement, building on the 2019 agreement and the Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation. Together, these agreements form the foundation for our nation-to-nation relationship with the Crown and affirm our right to govern our own internal affairs.

As I said recently to ministers at the federal-provincial-territorial-indigenous meeting on justice and public safety, community safety must be understood through an indigenous lens. For Métis people, safety begins with health, housing, family and connection to culture and language. These are the social determinants of health that shape whether a community is well, whether our children thrive and whether people feel hope for their future.

We know that Métis people are overrepresented in parts of the justice system, yet there is almost no distinctions-based data to tell us why. We are trying to solve a problem without the proper information to do so. Until we have Métis-specific data, programs and policies that reflect our realities, the system will continue to miss us. That is why the Otipemisiwak Métis Government is calling for investments that focus on prevention and healthy communities, not only intervention.

We are advancing a Métis health strategy, building culturally grounded child and family services under Bill C-92, and leading projects such as the Healing Waters Recovery Community, a land-based treatment centre that blends cultural and clinical care. These are safety programs too, because at its core, safety is wellness.

Community safety is also about trust, trust that justice will be fair and that every life is valued the same. That trust was once again broken in March 2020, when Jacob Sansom and Maurice Cardinal, two Métis hunters and family men, were murdered on a rural Alberta road. Their only crime was being indigenous men driving home with fresh meat to feed their families.

The leniency shown in the sentencing and parole of one of their killers, released on day parole after serving only part of his sentence, has shaken confidence in a justice system that too often asks indigenous victims to prove they deserve justice in the first place. This is why we cannot separate community safety from bail reform or justice reform. A system that releases violent offenders without proper accountability, while continuing to criminalize indigenous poverty and addiction, is not keeping anyone safe.

Our government also believes in strong, trust-based relationships with police, but those relationships must be built on respect and understanding. Many of our citizens live in rural or northern areas where policing can feel distant and where Métis voices are often missing from local safety planning. To support our citizens, we need to do this through partnership.

First, we need dedicated liaison officers within our government and sustainable funding that empowers us to build formal partnerships with police forces across jurisdictions.

Second, we need distinctions-based funding and databases for Métis-led safety initiatives so that prevention programs, community justice models and emergency-response systems are designed by our own people and rooted in our values.

Finally, we need the Crown to empower us and then get out of the way.

Meaningful partnership does not mean managing Métis priorities from Ottawa. It means recognizing that the Otipemisiwak Métis Government is ready and able to deliver solutions. We have proven that when Métis people lead, we deliver.

• (1650)

Mr. Chair, Métis people have always been builders and problem-solvers. Our nation was born from partnership and perseverance. We are ready to bring that same work ethic to create safer, healthier communities. For that to happen, Canada cannot see us as clients of policy, but as partners in governance.

Marsi.

The Chair: Thank you, Andrea.

Mylène, go ahead for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mylène Jaccoud (Professor, School of Criminology, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to participate in its work.

Today I will mostly just introduce myself and briefly explain the types of work I've done. Afterwards, I will obviously be available to answer questions from committee members.

I have been a professor at the School of Criminology at the Université de Montréal for some time, since 1994. I have specialized in indigenous realities related to the criminal justice system since I began my studies in 1986. Throughout my career, I have had many opportunities to observe the challenges faced by indigenous policing, both in the Inuit communities of Nunavik and in some first nations communities in Quebec. I've also been involved in some research projects, working groups and commissions of inquiry.

In particular, I was a member of the Council of Canadian Academies' Expert Panel on Policing in Indigenous Communities. In fact, I think you have had access to the report we tabled. I was also responsible for the indigenous policing component of the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Quebec. I may have the opportunity to explain to you how the commission worked, and I hope in particular to have the opportunity to speak to you about the gap between my recommendations and those that were accepted by the commissioner.

I'll add that I don't define myself as an expert on indigenous issues. I define myself as a generalist. While I have conducted specific work on issues directly related to the police, I have also conducted work on other issues, including self-determination in justice, justice committees in Quebec, community justice and other possibilities, violence against women and violence in communities. I've basically done qualitative research through observations and interviews. This work provides another lens on policing issues. I find it interesting to have a view of the challenges related to security and peacekeeping through other issues that have been discussed.

If I can be useful to your work, I would be happy to do so. I'll just tell you where I'm coming from and answer questions as best I can.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mylène.

Billy will kick things off for six minutes, please.

Billy Morin: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests today.

I'll start with President Sandmaier.

You highlighted a very prominent, challenging and tough incident in Alberta. Being from Edmonton, of course, I remember this incident with Jacob and Maurice. It's tough even talking about it now.

It's impossible to turn back time, but if things could be different with Métis liaison officers, community safety officers, do you think situations like that would not happen again if you had a stake and some jurisdictional respect, and a way of solving those rather than just being left out of first nations and Inuit policing program?

Andrea Sandmaier: I think a lot of that particular case does speak to community safety and that cultural competency that was discussed on the panel before. However, we need RCMP and other police forces within Alberta to know who we are as Métis people, to understand who we are and to understand our cultural practices.

There are a lot of things that stand out to me about this case, not only the senseless murder of two of our community members but also the lack of supports for the family. Victim services were not there for the family in the way they needed to be. They don't understand our culture, our language, who we are as Métis people. They actually refused to have victim services be with them during the entire devastating two years it took; and it's still ongoing.

Also, parole and the justice system itself... Sheriffs working within the courthouse where blatantly... You could see the racism in the remarks and the things that were done to the family as compared to the other family. There were a lot of things that were wrong with it.

For all of the justice system to know who we are as indigenous people, as Métis people, as first nations people, as Inuit people, and to have a full understanding of the distinctions based on who we are is really important.

● (1700)

Billy Morin: Absolutely. Reiterating a lot of what we heard from prior testimonies and throughout these last number of weeks, of course, there's no one size that fits all. Even you just now highlighted victim services, the justice system and the courts as being part of this process.

You spoke earlier about data management. I think that's one that often goes unspoken here and in policing. You have the best data. The community itself has the best data. Did you cite a specific investment or partnership that you're working on when it comes to data management in terms of safety and policing?

Andrea Sandmaier: I think there's a lack of data when it comes to Métis-specific.... Throughout a lot of different jurisdictions within government, whether it is justice, child and family services or health—all of those things—we're not in those statistics. We're not seen there. You either get “indigenous” or you get “first nations”, and there's no “Métis” drop-down on the menu when you're doing intake, whether it's in child and family services or in the justice system. Canada needs to do a better job, as does Alberta, of making sure that those statistics are true and correct.

We can do that work as well. We do that work with the little bit of funding that we have. Especially under justice, we don't have sustainable funding. We piece together different grants to make sure that we're helping our citizens as best we can.

Billy Morin: Maybe I'll go to Mylène.

You've read the reports. You've studied multiple different things. As we've heard, even in partnership with a prior witness who testified today, both public safety and IAC repeatedly promised action but cited jurisdictional complexities as a barrier. In your view, is this complexity real, or has it become an administrative excuse to avoid accountability?

[Translation]

Mylène Jaccoud: Can you clarify what you mean?

[English]

Billy Morin: I'm referring to jurisdiction in terms of “on reserve,” “off reserve,” RCMP and just the complexity of who has jurisdiction to do indigenous policing.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mylène Jaccoud: Personally, I think the jurisdiction belongs to the communities themselves. If I may give you my point of view on what seems to me to be an essential issue, I will tell you that I have the impression that we've been going around in circles for decades.

Unfortunately, I don't think it's just a question of jurisdiction. I think one of the major problems we've observed from the outset is that a lot of initiatives and reforms have been made in the courts and correctional services, but those reforms suffer from what I might call institutional dissonance.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We're going to have to go to the next speaker because we're over our time.

Next, from the Liberals, is MP Ginette Lavack.

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Thank you so much for being here and for sharing your important testimony.

[Translation]

My first question is for Ms. Jaccoud.

In your work, you emphasize the importance of focusing on the social determinants of safety and well-being rather than punitive or strictly crime prevention approaches. Some witnesses mentioned that most of the work police officers do is not directly related to law enforcement, but rather to social issues, such as mental health and poverty.

Can you explain how policing practices could be rethought based on a preventive approach focused on the relationships and determinants of policing, rather than relying on deterrence and coercion?

• (1705)

Mylène Jaccoud: Personally, I think that's the central issue. It stems from the fact that there's a lot of focus on the idea that problems in communities are crime problems, when in fact they are social problems that lead to criminal behaviour. The visible part of the problem—the crime, offence or transgression—is addressed. This is how it's been for decades. If a solution to the problem of overrepresentation can't be found, it is precisely because social problems aren't being addressed.

I think police forces should work more with community authorities.

I didn't have time to finish my point on institutional dissonance, but I do want to mention that when we undertake reforms in the courts or correctional services, we really try to recognize self-determination so that, as much as possible, first nations and Inuit communities can mobilize their justice mechanisms, which focus more on psychosocial issues than on transgression. This could be summarized as restorative justice, broadly speaking, but it isn't limited to that.

However, when it comes to the police, there is this dissonance, meaning that public safety issues are reduced to a problem of underfunding. In fact, I listened to the other testimonies to prepare myself, because I didn't know what to expect today: there was a lot of talk about underfunding, when we should be looking to the courts and correctional services as models.

To answer your question very directly, I would say that police services need to work closely with community authorities and support all community justice initiatives that are put in place. There are some great initiatives, including the Saqjuq project in Nunavik. A mobile response team has been set up and works specifically with social workers. It's a completely innovative project and it's the only initiative to set up a frontline service that receives calls directly, as far as I know. The police officer and social worker respond to calls, obviously taking into account the level of security required. For extremely dangerous cases, conventional police officers intervene. In the other cases, the mobile response team intervenes. This is one example of such initiatives, but we also have to work closely with the community justice systems that are being set up. That way, we can focus more on psychosocial issues rather than on transgressions and crime, which doesn't lead to much.

Ginette Lavack: My next question is for Ms. Sandmaier and Mr. Tomlinson.

[English]

Many Métis communities have expressed that the key to safety lies not just in enforcement but in healing relationships as preven-

tion, as you've mentioned here today. Could you share examples of priorities that your government is pursuing or wishes to pursue to build community-based, culturally grounded models for safety and well-being? didn't quite catch all of it, but, with regard to clinical and cultural healing, you mentioned a program that's been established or is in the works. Can you elaborate on that, please?

Andrea Sandmaier: Yes.

I just want to say one thing before I get into that. In kindergarten and grade 1, we were all asked what we wanted to be when we grew up. None of us said that we wanted to be criminals. Our citizens get there because of trauma and addiction that has happened in their lives.

One of the programs that we're doing with the Métis nation within Alberta is our recovery continuum. Our Healing Waters treatment centre is almost complete. It's a healing centre. It is cultural and clinical working together. That continuum isn't just about the treatment itself, it's about pre-treatment and post-treatment.

We know that 28 days in a recovery centre doesn't work—very rarely does it work. We're doing pre-treatment because there's such a waiting list before you can even get into a treatment centre. We're doing treatment, and we will do post-treatment as well. That post-treatment will have those wraparound services for our citizens so that they continue on their recovery journey. We help them get jobs; we help them get educated—all of those things. That is part of it.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next questioner is MP Sébastien Lemire.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have six minutes.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Jaccoud, thank you for being here today to share your expertise with us.

I can't help but note that, in your opening remarks, you said that there was a certain disconnect between Commissioner Viens' recommendations and your work.

Can you tell us more about that? Which of the recommendations you made didn't make it or were altered?

Mylène Jaccoud: Most of the commission's recommendations focus primarily on underfunding. That's really the lens that has been adopted. I'm not saying that this isn't a valid perspective, because there is indeed a problem of underfunding, but I think it's an extremely simplistic view of the problem and the issues related to indigenous policing.

One of my recommendations was to develop policing models grounded in indigenous legal traditions. It goes back a bit to what I was saying earlier, which is that, to try to avoid this institutional dissonance, we seek to reform and support initiatives that recognize self-determined indigenous models of justice, but when it comes to the police, it no longer makes the same sense at all. One of the recommendations I made in my report was to look at and support indigenous policing models, which are based on a very different design, as is well known. The contradictions and paradoxes in the reforms were important to me, but this recommendation wasn't adopted at all. Everything I had mentioned as necessary support for self-determination was also not retained.

To reinforce the idea of a different model of policing, I also recommended that we stop being inconsistent by asking pseudo-indigenous police officers to do the job. Currently, half of the 22 indigenous police forces in Quebec are non-indigenous. When we talk about indigenous police forces, we're talking about self-managed police forces, but not self-determined ones. Personally, I see a very big difference between self-management and self-determination. For indigenous peoples to develop culturally meaningful policing models, they would have to have an indigenous school, and police officers would no longer be trained at the national police academy, which teaches policing models that are completely at odds with indigenous traditions and cultural practices.

Those are just two examples.

Sébastien Lemire: You mentioned the Saqijuj project in Nunavik, among others, which focuses on a community approach aimed at rebuilding social regulation and strengthening public safety.

When you speak, I think a lot about the recommendations of Justice Jean-Charles Coutu, a family friend, who also contributed a great deal to advancing the issues you are raising, particularly the presence of the indigenous circle. He used to invite the chief of a community to participate in the deliberations to hear the community's point of view. Since you talk a lot about governance in your recommendations, I'd like to know whether you think that's one of the solutions that could be put forward.

We talk about the cost of policing, but there's also the cost of justice. There is a big social cost when indigenous people are brought to justice, particularly in Inuit communities, and imprisoned outside of their framework of values and justice.

• (1715)

Mylène Jaccoud: The example you give is not, in my opinion, an example of self-determination. This is the kind of tinkering, if I may say so, that has been going on for decades and hasn't achieved much. In fact, to me, it's consultative justice. Consultations and integration are conducted; this is what we call sentencing circles. It's better, yes, but it doesn't come close to the idea of indigenous justice that is—

Sébastien Lemire: You have to put it in context. At the time, it was still something innovative, but the goal isn't to debate it.

Mylène Jaccoud: Yes, but all these initiatives aimed at better consultation and including indigenous peoples, among others, involved them in a justice system that is not theirs. Progress is very limited when you go that route. Sure, it was better than a model of imposition, but consultation is not self-determination.

Sébastien Lemire: Absolutely.

My time is up.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Next is MP Jamie Schmale, for five minutes, please.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you again to our witnesses.

I just want to start by addressing something that happened in the last debate regarding Bill C-75.

Mr. Hanley, you brought that up. You're right that Bill C-75 doesn't necessarily cause crime, but I would argue that if we make bail easier to get, and if someone is then convicted of a crime, they have a chance of serving a lighter sentence or perhaps of spending time at home serving that sentence, so we might kind of embolden criminals to do the same crime.

As we've seen across the country, it's not necessarily a huge number of new criminals. It seems to be a small number doing the same crimes over and over again, which leads us to our conversation today about different methods and how to incorporate indigenous knowledge, methods and culture into the justice system at home.

I think we've heard about restorative justice and many other types that have been included in this conversation, which I think are worthy of expanding upon. If these are new systems that do work, I think we should be open to having that discussion. Otherwise, as was pointed out many times, we're just doing the same old same old, and expecting a different result.

I think that's a process we should be looking at. Whether it's policing or the socio-economic stages, I think there are a wide variety of things we can look at, but there's also an openness in this committee and otherwise to explore that.

President Sandmaier, I jumped in here a little late. You've been kind of quiet, so why don't we hear from you? What do you see as an alternative justice system for citizens of your nation? How do you see that playing out?

Andrea Sandmaier: For us, one of the biggest focuses will be on prevention, which is making sure that our youth are engaged and participating culturally in different things that we're doing throughout our nation. Restorative justice is a big thing for us as well. Unfortunately, because we continue to have to piece all of the funding and grant agreements together to do programming, it's not sustainable. We need sustainable funding in order to provide the programs that our citizens deserve and need. When we get a grant to do a restorative justice program and the grant is finished after two years, what do you think happens?

Jamie Schmale: They prefer more direct, long-term—

● (1720)

Andrea Sandmaier: We can't continue that restorative justice program because we have no more money to do it. The key is to have sustainable funding. We've proven with other programming and other long-term funding agreements that we have, whether with education or housing, that we know how to develop programs. We know what we're doing, and we get results.

We can do the same with justice. We have our own justice strategy that we've been working on for the last few years, and it is very important to our citizens. Prevention for us is key, as is making sure that we have programming in place for our youth and for our elders to work with youth. That is where it all starts, and we want to make sure that our kids stay out of the system.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Ms. Sandmaier.

I have about a minute and a half left, and I have two more questions for you, so I apologize if I cut you off.

I'm assuming that you know about the major projects office that was set up by this government.

Andrea Sandmaier: I do.

Jamie Schmale: Have you been involved in any discussions with them? Are you engaged in consultation to get some major projects approved and going?

Andrea Sandmaier: We have written letters and asked for meetings with the major projects office and haven't had a reply.

Jamie Schmale: Even though the major projects office is in Alberta and you are the President of—

Andrea Sandmaier: We have yet to have a response on our request for meetings.

Jamie Schmale: Isn't that interesting.

Andrea Sandmaier: Yes.

Jamie Schmale: I'm actually quite surprised to hear that you haven't been engaged somehow, considering that it's a priority to get some major projects approved and going.

Andrea Sandmaier: It is, yes.

Jamie Schmale: I'm assuming you would like to have a conversation to get those projects—

Andrea Sandmaier: We would.

Jamie Schmale:—whether they be involved in jobs or other opportunities. That's very interesting.

Mr. Chair, I know I have limited time left, and I would like to do a bit of housekeeping. I apologize to our witnesses. It should only take a minute or two.

It's that motion that was put on notice a few weeks ago. Maybe I can read it out, and we can get this dealt with very quickly.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Jamie Schmale: I move:

That, notwithstanding the usual practices of the committee concerning access to and distribution of documents,

- a) up to three associate members of the committee per party be authorized to receive the notices of meetings and notices of motion and be granted access to the digital binder;
- b) the associate members be designated by the offices of the whips of each recognized party and sent to the committee clerk; and
- c) the provisions of this motion expire as of January 26, 2026, unless otherwise ordered.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

That was a notice of motion that was submitted in both official languages earlier.

It has been read into the record.

Is there any discussion?

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: No, Mr. Chair, because it doesn't concern the Bloc Québécois.

We'll be voting in favour of the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will now go to MP Philip Earle for five minutes, please.

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

I have two questions. My first question is to Andrea, and my second question will be to Mylène.

Andrea, thank you for your testimony. You're very concise and very clear, and I really appreciated the way that you've brought your messaging to this committee today.

I heard you talk about community safety, which is really what we're here to talk about. While the study is on policing, community safety is paramount.

You talked about bail reform, and you talked about safety reform. You also told us that, as Métis, you are problem-solvers. Thinking about safer and healthier communities, as you presented, you said, "Get out of the way"—I may be paraphrasing. I understand that; you were presenting to us.

On the policing side it's "Get out of the way," but on the justice side, in keeping with the theme that may be more pronounced here today than normal, could you explain to this committee how you see policing and justice dovetailing, and whether there is a "Get out of the way" in that category as well?

Andrea Sandmaier: When I say, "Get out of the way," it means that we want to collaborate. We've always said that we want to collaborate with government to develop policy—sitting at this table, for example. We want to be at every table. We want to be in every discussion. We want to be part of the decisions when it comes to anything that is going to affect our community.

When I say, "Get out of the way", as I said earlier, we're very good at developing programs, and we get results with housing, education and all of the areas where we have those long-term funding agreements. We are good at that, so we don't need other governments to come in and tell us what to do in this program, how to fix this or how to do that. We know how to do it. We can get those results.

• (1725)

Philip Earle: In 10 seconds or so, how do you see that dovetailing with the justice system?

Policing I understand. How does that policing aspect interact with the justice piece, in your opinion?

Andrea Sandmaier: We, as Métis people, live all across Alberta. We have over 73,000 citizens. Unfortunately, our citizens do have to deal with police all the time, which is sad. We don't want to see that.

I'm not really sure what you're getting at. It's all one, policing and justice. If you are charged with something, you're going to end up in the justice system, so we need to make sure that we are a part of that.

Right now, in Alberta—and I think in Saskatchewan as well, and perhaps all the prairie provinces—we have a Métis liaison officer with the RCMP. We have one for all of Alberta, but we have over 73,000 citizens. For us, we would like to have funding to be able to have our own liaison officers.

With policing, we want to see us in the police force. Many people talked today about the number of indigenous police officers coming down. Why is that? Why is it happening?

Philip Earle: Thank you. I appreciate it.

If you have more information for us on that, you can certainly write in.

My next question is for Madame Jaccoud.

Coincidentally, today marks one year since the tragic shooting of an Inuk in Salluit in northern Quebec. Drawing on your 30 years of study in criminology, I want you, for a minute or so, to talk to us about the possible decline that you may see in Inuit and other indigenous first nations communities, where we're seeing more people dying from law enforcement. It's 40 times higher in the north in Canada than in the south.

Do you have anything you can share with us in that regard, knowing that you won't speak about the specific case in Salluit?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mylène Jaccoud: I didn't quite understand the question. I don't know if everything was interpreted correctly. Are you talking about deaths in custody or homicides?

[*English*]

Philip Earle: It's my view that we've seen more occurrences of police shootings of individuals in the north. I want to draw on your 30 years of experience in your field to give us some perspective on what you believe may be the cause of that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perhaps we could get that in writing afterwards, because we're over the time.

[*Translation*]

Mylène Jaccoud: It's because the police—

Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There were 20 seconds left for a response, but there was an issue with understanding the interpretation, and the witness asked for clarification. I would ask you to grant her those 20 seconds, since I personally think the clock should have been stopped to ensure that both official languages were well represented.

[*English*]

The Chair: If you can give us a short, brief answer, I'll allow it with the consent of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mylène Jaccoud: The issue with police officers in Nunavik is that they aren't Inuit. They're very inexperienced, because there's an extremely high turnover rate. That means there's a blatant lack of knowledge of local realities.

However, that question deserves a much more detailed answer.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We'll go to Sébastien for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Jaccoud, our study is on indigenous policing and public safety. What do you think the federal government's role and our role as legislators should be?

Mylène Jaccoud: The essential role is to support self-determination and implement the countless recommendations that have been tabled over time.

As far as I'm concerned, one of the extraordinary commissions was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which went much further than the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Unfortunately, its recommendations just sat on the shelves, meaning that not much happened. Still, that's a gold mine of initiatives. It's really something extraordinary, but it hasn't been implemented.

The federal government should implement, then, what has been recommended for decades.

• (1730)

Sébastien Lemire: A number of indigenous communities are concerned that federal and provincial policing programs often prioritize law enforcement over prevention or mediation. In terms of policies, what changes would help rebalance those priorities in favour of community well-being or restorative practices?

Mylène Jaccoud: I think it's really important to help fund prevention initiatives.

For example, I'm somewhat responsible for starting the Saqijjuq project, which was implemented following a report I tabled in 2010. Right now, there's a program called on-the-land activities, in which people are sent out on the land accompanied by guides. However, the program is struggling to move forward because it receives very little support, even though, according to assessments, it produces excellent results in terms of prevention and care. Since it isn't formalized or institutionalized, meaning that it isn't part of a conventional clinical approach, such as a treatment centre, it isn't valued very highly.

It's important to have the courage to let those initiatives exist and to fund them. There's no shortage of funding; it's just a matter of funding the right initiatives, like that one. There has to be more prevention and more consistency across policing, prevention measures and the justice system. I feel very strongly about that.

For example, healing lodges are amazing initiatives, but they're underfunded. There's only one in Quebec. There should be some in Nunavik and the territories, for example. Those are exceptional therapeutic environments. Everything is there, but it's important to fund those initiatives, which aren't complicated.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Jamie, you have five minutes, please.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you for the opportunity to come back and jump in on a topic that was just mentioned by the professor.

When you're talking about prevention, socio-economic aspects tie in to it, so let's pick up where we left off.

The first nations major projects office is in Calgary, Alberta. You are the president of OMG.

You have sent how many letters to the projects office for a meeting?

Andrea Sandmaier: There have been multiple communications with the major projects—

Jamie Schmale: And radio silence.

Have you heard of any other meetings taking place? Are there other organizations, indigenous or otherwise, meeting with the major projects coalition from Alberta?

Andrea Sandmaier: I believe there have been.

Jamie Schmale: There have been. Okay.

You have sent a number of letters and you haven't heard back. How would you like to participate? What would be your idea on how to participate in these meetings with the major projects coalition? Where could you offer some collaborative guidance or relationship building with this office?

If there's a pipeline that involves natural resources, it's most likely originating in Alberta.

I'm thinking jobs. I'm thinking partnerships. I'm thinking growth in the economy, which might lead to prevention as well.

Andrea Sandmaier: All of those things, MP Schmale, are important to the Otipemisiwak Métis Government and our citizens. We have hundreds of Métis entrepreneurs who are very anxious, very much wanting to get involved and grow their businesses.

In Alberta, as you said, we have natural resources. We have other industries that can have the potential of having major projects in Alberta, and we want to be a part of it. We need to sit down and have a meaningful conversation.

• (1735)

Jamie Schmale: When you have these opportunities, it helps you as a government to provide for your people—

Andrea Sandmaier: It does.

Jamie Schmale: —and opens up those opportunities for those individuals to either get a job or create a business and create more opportunity and wealth for others.

Jaime Battiste: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if this is going to tie back to indigenous policing at some point.

I know that for the rest of this week, we're going to be talking a great deal about budgets and what's coming tomorrow, but for right now, indigenous policing is a really serious matter, and I would like to see some connection to it and not just go all over the place.

Jamie Schmale: Yes, for sure. I get that.

It is my time.

I would also say, Chair, to my colleague opposite, that the professor did mention prevention. One prevention is a strong economy. When we're talking about socio-economic issues, jobs are a pretty good one; prevention is a good one, and I think it takes.... This ties into it as well. If we can prevent someone from committing a crime with the help of a good job, it might prevent further impacts on the justice system all the way through.

The Chair: Keep the questions relevant like that, please.

Jamie Schmale: I thought I did, but we'll keep going.

I had just asked a question about the ability for individuals, Métis, first nations, whatever.... It did provide opportunities for them to get a job or create a job, opportunities that could then help others who are struggling.

Andrea Sandmaier: Yes, I mean, having a job is very much part of prevention, for sure. To criminalize poverty and addiction is wrong. We need to make sure that our citizens are doing well, whether that be through education or employment. All of those things are part of the prevention piece.

Jamie Schmale: When you're talking about mental health and addictions, are there proper treatment facilities available? It's not always just to be arrested, go through the justice system, maybe end up in prison and who knows what happens after that. Are there proper treatment facilities available?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Andrea Sandmaier: That's what we are working on right now—our Healing Waters Recovery continuum. Our recovery treatment centre will be finished, I believe, in the spring.

We also already have pre-treatment. As I stated earlier, there is a gap between detox and going to a treatment centre. A lot of citizens who are in detox sometimes will have to wait six or seven weeks to get into a treatment centre. That is not right. That leads to many citizens going back to using again and not getting into treatment at all. We have pre-treatment, our treatment centre and then we are looking towards post-treatment as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For our last round of questions, we have MP Brendan Hanley, please.

Brendan Hanley: Thank you very much to the three of you.

[*Translation*]

I'll start with Ms. Jaccoud.

Thank you for being here.

Both here and in the press, you've talked a lot about policing models. You've said how important it is to have a policing model that focuses not on repression but on communities where police officers are very close to citizens.

I represent the Yukon, and we have the community safety planning program. You may have heard of it. Despite a chronic lack of funding, if I may say so, some communities benefit from greater presence of police officers who are truly community-oriented. They establish social ties with the community and work very closely with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police when circumstances permit. I think we have a lot to learn from that model.

Can you comment on that model or a similar model, applied particularly in the north, that can address the concerns you've raised?

Mylène Jaccoud: As I said in my opening remarks, I'm not an expert on policing. However, I have colleagues who work on police-related issues.

I don't know if you know this, but in 2025, the best way to promote public safety is by sharing that safety. More and more people

are saying that police services shouldn't be solely responsible for safety. The models are completely outdated, and not just in an indigenous context.

The best possible approach is what we call sharing protection, safety and de-escalation. That's what the Saqijjuq project is all about. The Saqijjuq organization's project is about sharing safety and protection. The word "punishment" doesn't exist in that project. There is no punishment. In fact, what there needs to be more of is protection. Sometimes, dangerous individuals have to be isolated to ensure their protection or the protection of others. That isn't done to punish them. This model specifically aims to share prevention and protection, among other things.

I already gave the example of the mobile intervention team, but there's a very promising model that you may have heard of and that we mentioned in the Council of Canadian Academies' report. It's called the hub model. I don't know if you've heard about it in your meetings. That model was imported from Europe. It has been developed in some communities, such as Alberta and Prince Albert. The results seem to be quite positive in terms of reducing recidivism.

I think we also have to change our evaluation criteria and move away from the issue of recidivism. We have to change our evaluation and assessment criteria to focus on people's well-being. That's one of the things that the Saqijjuq project is about. Recidivism is very complicated. A hub policing model should be created, and mobile intervention teams should be set up. It's important to work together. That's certainly the way to go. In fact, I think those policing models should incorporate the transfer of knowledge and experience, that is, the knowledge of people who work in social services, schools, education and so on. It should be possible to work together. Even parents and families have knowledge in the matter.

I think it's important to have the courage to rethink the police. I would say that indigenous policing is perhaps the best way to find other policing models that are very promising, even for non-indigenous people.

• (1740)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes the testimony for today.

Thank you, everyone, for your excellent testimony again. We got off a little bit late because of the vote, so thank you, everybody, for your patience.

With permission, I shall adjourn.

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