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Chair

Mr. Daryl Kramp

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC)): Colleagues, welcome to this third meeting of the second session of the 41st Parliament of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Before we start today, let me first welcome our clerk, Evelyn Lukyniuk, who's just back from maternity leave. Certainly I think it's in order that we offer her congratulations on her new daughter, Elizabeth.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Prior to hearing from our witnesses, colleagues, I have one small change to the agenda that I would like to bring to your attention.

Under item two, committee business, we had a motion that was presented by Mr. Easter and that was in order. Mr. Easter has asked that we postpone that. He has a serious personal matter that he has to leave the committee early for today. So we will not be proceeding with that motion. He's asked that we defer it until after the Remembrance Day break. I will be bringing that back to committee for your consideration at that point.

We now have before us a familiar face for a number of people here. I understand that our guest, Mark Potter, has been here before. I think this will be the fourth time.

As a new member, I'm eager to hear his summation and his thoughts on the past studies and where we need to go forward from his perspective. I know that colleagues who have obviously had that opportunity to deal with Mr. Potter before are certainly looking forward to catching up on his thoughts.

I understand that back in June Mr. Potter presented a summit report that was issued. I'm hoping that most colleagues have had an opportunity to peruse that. If not, of course they'll have the opportunity on the floor today for questions.

Mark Potter, you now have the floor, sir.

Mr. Mark Potter (Director General, Policing Policy Directorate, Law Enforcement and Policing Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone. It's great to be back here again.

This is an important topic. It has been tremendously helpful that this committee has been engaged in this and has been calling the witnesses that it has to discuss this issue. We very much look forward to your report.

Since we last met in the spring, there have been a number of developments that I would like to update you on, as well as outline the way forward. Before doing so, and particularly for the benefit of the new members, I would like to provide some brief background information on the issue of the economics of policing.

First, what is it? What is the issue of the economics of policing?

The economics of policing is a wide-ranging issue related to the efficiency and effectiveness of policing and of public safety more broadly. It is both a challenge and an opportunity for Canada and many other countries. The economics of policing have become increasingly relevant as all governments grapple with demonstrating the value of increasingly costly public services at a time of fiscal constraints.

The Canadian public is aware of and engaged·on the issue. There is an active public commentary on the steady and significant growth in policing costs during a time of declining reported crime. However, within this public debate, there is only a limited understanding of the increasingly diverse and complex nature of police work and crime.

Police are increasingly called upon to deal with a high volume of non-criminal public order incidents, including a growing number of mental health and addiction issues. Police are also addressing significant and time-consuming new crimes and challenges, such as terrorism, cybercrime, financial crime, child sexual exploitation, and dealing with large-scale gatherings and protests.

For example, we heard at the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police conference in August that arrests under the Mental Health Act have quadrupled in Vancouver in the last 10 years. Further, it was noted that on any given night at Sudbury's main hospital, there can be up to a dozen police officers dealing with mental health and addiction incidents.

Put simply, although reported crime has declined overall, police are still very busy.

Faced with these challenges, some governments and parts of the policing community are actively pursuing opportunities to strengthen policing through dialogue and engagement with citizens, taking actions to increase operational and structural efficiency and effectiveness, and investing in proactive, integrated community safety approaches to get at the roots of crime.

This momentum of change and innovation can benefit in many areas from collaboration through a common strategy and actions. The Minister of Public Safety has been providing leadership and coordination on the economics of policing. Provincial and territorial ministers, police leaders, mayors, and many others are also focused on this issue, and we have all come together to try to address it.

The work under way on the economics of policing is driven by three key commitments agreed to by all federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers of Justice and Public Safety in January and October 2012.

The first was to convene a summit on the economics of policing. The summit was successfully held in January 2013 and has contributed to the dialogue and momentum of reform.

Second, ministers agreed to share information across jurisdictions on policies and practices that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policing. A key deliverable in this regard was the launch of the index of police initiatives in August on Public Safety Canada's website. The index is a searchable database of best practices that facilitates learning from one another so that innovations can be pursued without reinventing the wheel. For example, it can provide helpful information with respect to the adoption of best practices for dealing with individuals with mental health and addiction issues. The index currently contains 140 initiatives. It will continue to expand and grow. A link to the website index has been provided to each of you in the documents that have been circulated.

Third, ministers tasked officials to develop a shared forward agenda or strategy for policing and public safety in Canada. Approval of that strategy will be sought when FPT ministers meet later this month in Whitehorse. The shared forward agenda is being developed through collaboration among all governments, most notably Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia as champions, as well as the active and constructive contributions of Canada's three main police associations and many others.

The main principles behind the evolving strategy are to cooperate collectively in those areas where it makes sense to do so, while respecting jurisdictional responsibilities for policing, and to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach to public safety; that is to say, it involves reaching out to and working with all elements that contribute to public safety, from police to courts, to schools, and to social service agencies.

● (1105)

The expected goals of the strategy are: one, increase the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in Canada; two, encourage learning, innovation, and the application of best practices; and three, contribute to improved public safety outcomes and social well-being through partnership and integrated approaches.

Overall, it is about working collaboratively and contributing positively to the evolution and sustainability of policing and public safety in Canada. The shared forward agenda is emerging based on the framework that was introduced at the summit in January 2013. It is being oriented around three pillars: efficiencies within police services; new models of community safety; and efficiencies within the justice system. These three pillars will be supported by the foundational elements of research and information sharing.

Policing reform and innovation must be founded upon a solid base of evidence and research if it is to be successful over the longer term. Currently in Canada there is minimal policing-related research capacity; there is no central repository of accessible research information; and there is limited agreement within the policing community on research priorities. The strategy is expected to begin addressing these gaps. Building on the index of innovative policing initiatives, it is proposed that Public Safety Canada will continue to advance information sharing through its economics of policing website portal.

Another information-sharing proposal that has emerged through consultations is the organization of focused learning events in areas such as civilianization, tiered policing, and the use of technology in order to advance reform efforts based on evidence, best practices, and sharing of experiences. At the core of the proposed strategy is helping police services to become more efficient and effective; however, one of the challenges in strengthening efficiency and effectiveness is measuring results and using that data as the basis for continuous improvement and public reporting. Ontario is a leader in this area and is developing a framework of key police performance metrics linked to efficiency and effectiveness and public safety outcomes.

Other potential actions that have been raised include: striving to reduce police equipment costs through common networks for procurement and shared services; linking police recruitment and training programs to qualifications standards; and helping police reform their organizations to be more effective.

In terms of new models of community safety, as you have heard from several witnesses, police services increasingly are exploring and adopting proactive integrated community safety strategies that get at the roots of crime through targeted support to at-risk youth and families. There are many examples of such programs, and some communities are advanced in their efforts, including the HUB model that has been successfully applied in Saskatchewan and elsewhere.

The need to strengthen data collection, assessment, and evaluation around such new approaches to allow for the validation and refinement of crime prevention models of the future is an important element of any strategy.

With respect to the third pillar of the strategy, efficiencies within the justice system, nationally and provincially, efforts are under way to improve efficiencies. Such changes can have a direct and significant impact on police operations and costs. Potential actions under consideration are for governments to share information on reforms that improve justice efficiency and also that they work with police associations and others to identify policing priorities for justice reform and incorporate this information into current and future justice reform initiatives.

The development of the shared forward agenda is a unique opportunity for governments to continue to demonstrate collective leadership and accelerate the momentum of change. We also have an opportunity over time to build a more integrated and proactive public safety system that results in even less crime and greater social well-being and quality of life.

However, for the strategy to be successful, it will need to respect jurisdictional responsibilities for policing and be inclusive of the entire policing community and other key stakeholders. It is only through such a collective, focused, and well-considered approach that we can meet the high expectations of Canadians for continuously improving public safety and policing.

That concludes my opening remarks. Your questions and comments would be welcomed.

Thank you very much.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Potter. We certainly appreciate your continued work on this file.

If we may, now we will go to the questioning.

With seven minutes from the government side, Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Potter, for your testimony.

To you through the chair, one of the first things, of course, when we deal with the economics of policing—I've talked to police officers out in the field, as I did over the break—is that I assure police officers that the purpose of this study is not to look for ways to lay off police officers. It's not necessarily to do that and not necessarily to change the parameters, but to look specifically at how we can perform the function of policing across this country. The federal government is just entering this study to look at a pan-Canadian experience in an attempt to identify models that work.

My specific question will be as follows. It is my observation that one of the reasons—and you mentioned it in the body of your presentation—is issues surrounding mental illness and how we treat mental illness, along with issues surrounding young offenders and how we handle young offenders. Would you not agree with me that one of the reasons...? In Ontario specifically, and I suspect in other provinces, there's a regulatory regime that requires police forces to have specially trained investigators for things like sexual assaults, to have special domestic assault squads. Would you not agree with me that one of the causes of the increased costs of policing has to do with the increased demands that we as the public and we as legislators put on police forces in saying that they must have specific individuals to do specific jobs? Also, we as legislators give them additional work to do every now and then, and we tend to not increase the size of their human resource complement.

Would you agree with some of those statements? Do you have some specifics you can relate in order to better assist the folks at home who may be interested in this subject and are looking at the work of this committee?

● (1115)

Mr. Mark Potter: Thank you for that question. You've touched on a number of important elements, and I'll just cover a few of them, if I may.

With regard to the issue of police officers' salaries, I'm well aware that's extremely sensitive. I think it's definitely not the role of the federal government to tell provincial governments and municipal authorities what they should be paying their police officers. I think police officers do tremendously challenging work and need to have very comprehensive training to deal with a wide range of possible scenarios whenever they go out to a call. It's that unique capability, which police in Canada fulfill tremendously well in almost all instances, that makes them, I think.... In order to attract and retain those types of individuals with the wide range of skills they need to have, you need to pay them well. I think if you want to have good-quality police officers, you need to pay them a good, reasonable salary.

I don't think the debate is about layoffs or necessarily about reducing officers' salaries; it's far from it. I think it's about recognizing that 80% of a police budget is typically for labour costs, so how can you most efficiently use that spending envelope? How can you deploy those officers most efficiently to achieve the objectives you're trying to achieve in terms of public safety outcomes?

I don't think the debate is about whether officers' salaries should necessarily be higher or lower. However, there is a reality in certain jurisdictions that police officers' salaries have been rising well above inflation due to the ratcheting up of those salaries through collective bargaining and arbitration processes. We are seeing a little bit more of a flatlining of those salaries happening across the country as a result of the recession and as a result of the fiscal situation in many parts of the country. I think that issue of salaries rising relative to the average Canadian salary is being brought under control just as a result of the economic and fiscal situation.

Regarding the broader point you raised about the demands on police, when we look at the number of calls for service, which is often a better measure of how active police are in our communities, it's been rising steadily over the years, and when you look at the nature of those calls, as was mentioned, the majority of them are non-criminal. We as a society are asking police to take on more tasks and more responsibilities, particularly with respect to individuals with mental health and addiction issues. Increasingly, they are dealing with quality-of-life issues, ensuring that the communities are safe, that residents feel safe in their communities, and that there is a visible police presence in certain types of communities that are experiencing challenges with disorder or with mischief.

As a number of you know from your direct experience in policing and from talking to police officers, they are often, as Chief Chu said, the call of first resort. They're available 24/7/365, and they're really the only agency out there that is. So often whenever there's a problem in a community, it's the police who are called.

They are tremendously busy responding to a whole range of calls. How efficiently can they do that? In most cases police have made a lot of gains in deploying those resources. Often the first challenge when you look at how to improve the efficiency is demand management. How are you responding to the demands of your community? How are you scheduling your officers? How are you deploying them—in crews of one or two—and so on? These are key questions they look at when they delve into how efficiently they're responding to these growing demands.

Perhaps I'll pause there and allow for further questions.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

I have observed, although I've been out of the business for quite some time, that more and more demands are placed not only on proper training.... I recall having four to six obligatory days per year for training. There's roughly a week when the officer isn't on the road doing his or her job.

I'd like to ask you a specific question. I know you are aware of some of the places this committee has gone and some of the things we've observed. You talked particularly about Saskatchewan and the hub. Have you observed in your studies and your communications with other entities that police forces today are sharing more and more best practices?

Could you also comment on how what works in one police department does not necessarily work in another because of socio-economic realities and workload and the realities of geography?

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Norlock.

Could we have a very brief response, Mr. Potter?

Mr. Mark Potter: I think in terms of information sharing there's a considerable gap in Canada. When you look at what exists in the U. K., in the United States, in Australia, and in New Zealand, in terms of their capacity through databases, through research forums, and through learning events to share information and exchange best practices, we are well behind other countries in those regards.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Potter, for being with us again.

My first question is about how the work we're doing in this study potentially relates to the strategy. As I think all members are aware, because of prorogation we were set back by a month, so we have not actually completed our report and were unable to have it fit in before your recommendations go to the ministers' meeting.

At this point, I guess, here's my question. When we do get the report...? Again, we're probably going to have another delay, because Bill C-2, instead of going to the health committee, is going to be referred to this committee, and legislation takes precedence, so we'll be set back even further.

I'm concerned about how the work we've invested in this study can be most effectively communicated to you at Public Safety to be considered as part of the strategy that's being developed.

Mr. Mark Potter: Thank you.

I think there are a couple of dimensions. We've been following your deliberations very closely. It's been very helpful for us to hear what you've had to say, what the witnesses have had to say, and the sorts of questions that have been raised. We've taken careful note of a lot of the information that's been conveyed to this committee, and that's been factored into what we're bringing forward to the ministers next week in Whitehorse.

The second answer I'll give is that we think your study and its recommendations will be tremendously helpful in providing further guidance, another key ingredient in moving this issue forward, so what we will look to is those recommendations. We'll look at them in contrast to what's going to be brought forward to ministers next week.

What's being brought forward to ministers is at a pretty high level, as these strategies typically are. There's research, there's information sharing, and then there are the three pillars: efficiencies within police services, new models of community safety, and justice efficiencies.

Under each of those categories, there are three, four, or five directions that are identified. Some of those areas we foresee, because we know there's already a pretty strong consensus in the policing community, particularly on the research and information-sharing side, for what we need to do. We've looked at other models and we've done a lot of research, so we have a pretty good plan. It's more a question now that once ministers approve it, we can begin moving it forward. There will still be a lot of details to work through, and there will be active consultations to do that.

Then there's another phase to the strategy: those areas where it's going deeper. I mentioned, for example, common procurement of equipment, which is something that we're seeing in other jurisdictions. That's a pretty big step for a number of police services and jurisdictions. We have, based on the consultations to date, a considerable level of support for that, but it's something where you need to continue to do your research and further engagement and get more input. There's a number of recommendations in that second phase where particularly the views of this committee could be tremendously helpful.

Then there's the stuff that we haven't necessarily thought about, or that anyone has thought about, as thoroughly as we should have. Hopefully, the committee may have a few insights in that regard. I don't see the strategy as being set at one point and that's it. The strategy will be presented to ministers. It's at a pretty high level. It contains a number of directions, but that strategy is going to continue to evolve.

As I think a number of people have said, this period of transformation and reform in policing is not a single point where you decide what you're going to do and you move forward. There's a lot of learning by doing and there's a lot of experimentation happening, both in Canada and elsewhere, so the reactions of governments and police services to this challenge are going to continue to evolve.

I guess the short answer is that we're very much looking forward to your study. I think it will be very helpful input, certainly for the federal government, as well as all governments, and for police services going forward.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you for that reassurance. I know that all members of the committee will be doing our best, within our constraints, to get your input as soon as we can.

I have a concern about a phrase that appears a few times in your presentation. It is “while respecting jurisdictional responsibilities”. It seems to me that in emphasizing that phrase there's a danger that a couple of things will be neglected. One of those is first nations policing, which we've included as part of our study and which quite often gets shuffled about, as many first nations issues do. Instead of people actually tackling the issue, they point at each other and say, “That's really your responsibility.” I have that concern about first nations.

Secondly, it seems to me that the RCMP is not mentioned here. While the RCMP does a lot of its policing under provincial jurisdiction, it is a federal police force. While the strategy is not aimed at any of the particular problems we have in the RCMP right now, such as sexual harassment or the missing and murdered women controversy—and I don't expect those to appear here—it seems peculiar to me that the emphasis is always on municipal and provincial policing and that we have no mention of the RCMP in your document. I'm presuming that there may be some gaps, from my point of view, in the strategy because of that.

● (1125)

Mr. Mark Potter: I think it's a fair question. What we've tried to stress, and if I had more time I'd elaborate, is that the strategy is for all policing—first nations, provincial, municipal, and RCMP. As to the jurisdictional split, I think as you well know, the Minister of Public Safety has a mandate to provide leadership for public safety in Canada. That's the mandate upon which he is trying to show initiative and advance the strategy. But clearly the Constitution Act says the administration of justice is a provincial responsibility, and we have to be extremely respectful of that.

It's about working through the FPT processes to build consensus on a way forward. When we've been doing our consultations through the associations with police services, we've been very cognizant of ensuring that first nations are engaged in that process. That happens in a number of ways through their involvement in the various associations for policing of which they are active members. They have their own police association and we've been talking to them. We talk to individual representatives of first nations police services. We are very aware of the testimony that has been provided here.

There was in fact a conference last year in Whitehorse on remote and northern policing that looked at the particular challenges. It's an extremely challenging environment, as you know, to provide police services in remote and northern communities. That element is one that is very well considered. But the strategy itself you'll only see as we begin to roll out various elements of it. Once it is approved, as we hope it will be, we will see how we are going to make sure it responds to first nations concerns.

The Minister of Public Safety is accountable for the RCMP to Parliament. He has taken certain actions, and I've mentioned those during previous times that I've been here.

The Chair: I believe Mr. Garrison has one more quick question. He has about 15 seconds or so to get to you. Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Garrison, do you have a question?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Well, I appreciate the things mentioned here. One of the things we'll need to grapple with is that governments are awfully good at doing studies and compiling information and then not actually doing anything. I look forward to our committee considering what the federal government could do in some of these areas instead of just thinking about it. I'm a former academic and I believe in evidence-based policy. But at some point, you have to take action. I'm a little concerned that we're lacking action in all of this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garrison and Mr. Potter.

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's good to be sitting in on this committee.

Mr. Potter, I appreciated your presentation and your answers.

I'm going to turn the channel a little bit here. I was in municipal government for 12 and a half years, and I still follow my local government. The big issue out there today, and it was a concern when I was on local council, is rising policing costs. In every municipality in my riding, that seems to be in the papers almost weekly.

One thing has come to my attention over the last couple of years, and I'd like you to comment on it. We all know about the seat belt blitzes and RIDE programs. Now the big one seems to be distracted driver blitzes, because of texting and what have you. I understand that they are all part of policing and educating the public. But one thing does concern me, and personally I think it's wrong. It has come to my attention that police don't do it on their regular policing shifts. They bring in officers, all on overtime, to do them. This seems to occur in all police forces, although I'm not sure about the RCMP. Anyway, I'd just like your comments on that, whether you think that's right. There's no doubt in my mind that this has a huge effect on driving up local policing costs.

● (1130)

Mr. Mark Potter: First, with the utmost respect, I would have to say that it's not the role of the federal government to comment on the operations of particular police services in this country, including the RCMP. That is a clear delineation in law and there are good reasons for it. So I'm reluctant to comment.

I can comment on studies and analyses that have been done. Let's take the Vancouver Police Department. They had an overtime problem in the mid-2000s. Overtime was an increasingly growing share of their budget and it just wasn't sustainable. Edmonton has had similar challenges, as have many police forces. They've looked at what is causing that overtime and how they can contain it. Whether it's court appearances, which often involve officers wasting a lot of their time sitting around courtrooms, as you've heard in this committee, or whether it's some of the other examples you gave. I know that's an area of focus for them. When they look at demand management and the best use of their resources, often overtime is a key starting point.

Mr. Larry Miller: Right, and I'm glad to hear that you recognize it's probably part of the problem.

What I was asking you for was not about the legalities of whether you can comment or not. I think from a personal standpoint you could have, but I'm not going to dwell on that.

I have the utmost respect for policing. I put the police on the same pedestal as nurses, doctors, and paramedics. I'm not going to get into the wages. I don't think they're underpaid, but I'm certainly not going to sit here and say they're overpaid. That's a discussion people will always have. I think overtime is an issue.

One other thing I've noticed, which you could comment on, is that when it comes to accidents—both major and minor accidents, in my opinion—the police almost appear to be working for the insurance companies. They seem to be there. The roads are now closed for hours, where they didn't used to be. Roads might have been reduced to one lane, but at least that would keep the traffic moving. But most police tell me, and I have family members in it, that it's basically there to CYA, meaning cover your butt, when it comes to insurance investigations.

While I'd like to think that policing has always been done thoroughly, I wonder what the reason for the change is, because the appearance is that they're working for the insurance companies, as much as anything.

Mr. Mark Potter: I think one of the benefits of this issue of the economics of policing is that it has started a public debate. Police services, police boards, and their residents are talking about what it is the police do and how they do it, and about issues such as cost recovery.

In Ottawa, for example, the Ottawa Police Service has brought forward a program of cost recovery for exactly what you're talking about. When they prepare an accident report, often it is primarily, but not exclusively, for the benefit of an insurance company. They have adapted their policies and their related cost-recovery fees to fully cost recover the preparation of those reports and to charge the insurance companies for that. I think there are movements afoot to do that.

Mr. Larry Miller: I'm glad to hear they are recovering that cost. I think a lot of people, including me, weren't aware of that.

To go back to overtime, one thing I've always sympathized with police over is all the work and paperwork they have to do. Then, whether or not it's their day off, they have to attend court cases whenever they occur. Quite often I think, and I'd like you to comment on it, whether it's due to our judicial system or just lawyers, a lot of cases end up getting remanded and are basically a waste of policing time.

Could you comment on that, and how the federal government could possibly make some changes that might help that situation? You're never going to eliminate it, I realize that.

Mr. Mark Potter: When the Canadian Police Association came here, they talked about a number of concerns in that regard. They talked in particular about disclosure and the disclosure of all documents, evidence, and information to the judiciary in moving forward with a case. They highlighted the incredible burden that's often placed on police to prepare that information. I think the solution is not only things like processes but also things like technology. How are we using information technology to streamline and make that process as efficient as possible, so that the officers are able to minimize the time they're spending on administrative paperwork but still ensure, for due process, that the information the courts require is conveyed?

When we say we want to engage under that third pillar of justice efficiencies with the justice community, we're respectful of the independence of courts, but we would like to ensure that as they reform themselves, whether through procedural change or use of technology, they're aware of policing priorities and the policing implications of everything they do. Document discovery is one very good example, highlighted by other witnesses to this committee, where there needs to be some streamlining, possibly through the use of technology, to make that a lot more efficient. What we can do is convey those concerns.

We can also look at what the best practices are, for example, through learning events on the use of technology more broadly in policing. What's happening in the U.K., Australia, and the U.S. to streamline those and many other processes through the use of technology?

● (1135)

The Chair: That's the end, Mr. Potter.

I appreciate your just snipping off on that, but I think we should give Mr. Easter an opportunity now.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's fine.

First, is any research being done on the economics? Maybe it has come from a previous witness. To be quite honest, I'm just getting up to speed on this particular study. In terms of the amount of time—Larry mentioned it. That seems to be one of the complaints I hear, the amount of time spent on paperwork, what police officers figure is useless paperwork, but in terms of the cost of policing, how does the human component, if I could put it that way, compare with the equipment infrastructure costs?

Chair, I look at the Hill, and one day I counted 14 RCMP cars sitting idle on the Hill.

How much money is spent on basic equipment infrastructure technology versus people who are out on the street policing? Is there any way we can get that information, or do you have it?

Mr. Mark Potter: I think you've raised an issue that's pretty complex in many respects. It gets at the issues of technology, of how you're deploying your police officers, of tiered policing, and the use of civilians to provide support to police.

I know a number of jurisdictions have looked at models whereby the police, who, as mentioned, are highly trained to deal with a wide range of outcomes and scenarios whenever they are called to an incident...that's their main value added. They can deal with everything from trying to talk down a person to using lethal force, and no one else can do that, so that's a tremendously important skill set. You want to ensure that those individuals are deployed to the right sorts of tasks.

Having that sort of individual with those complex skill sets writing reports and spending six or seven hours on a “driving under the influence” charge is not necessarily always the best use of that officer's time. So how can you adjust the processes by streamlining them, how can you use technology more effectively to convey the information throughout the process, and how can you engage other individuals—civilian support staff—who can take on some of those functions? There are examples when the police might be called to deal with a particular incident. They will contain the situation, they will get it under control, and then you might have a community safety officer, an auxiliary police officer, or a civilian take over the process and wrap it up by preparing paperwork and so on.

I think police are experimenting with different approaches, and the U.K. is a good example of this, to ensure those highly trained resources are deployed in the circumstances and the amount of time they are required to be deployed, and then you have others who can back them up and support them to deal with the more routine paperwork, administrative tasks associated with providing the sort of support the court system and citizens expect them to be able to convey.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Is any work being done on the number of inefficiencies created for police officers themselves by the court system? I think Larry outlined it.

I have talked to police officers who have gone back and forth to court when they should have been on the road. Yes, sometimes it's on their day off, but it ties up a phenomenal amount of time with what I would say are a lot of inefficiencies within the court system itself.

Is there any data, or is there something we can be recommending in that regard to make the two work together more efficiently?

● (1140)

Mr. Mark Potter: I'd refer to what's happening in British Columbia. They have taken a pretty careful look at their justice system. There have been a number of reports, including those of Mr. Cowper, and the government has developed an action plan on that basis.

One of the things they are looking at is the integrated management of the entire court system and how that links to the police interface to ensure that all the processes and all the technologies are as efficient and streamlined as possible. Often when you have these silos, you create procedures that are not efficient.

One of the very simple things they look at is things like scheduling of officers to make court appearances, and ensuring those schedules are done in such a way that they meet court needs while also meeting the officers' needs, in particular scheduling them, not through overtime but when he or she is on a regular shift, and asking them to come in when they know they are not likely to be as busy.

Perhaps more fundamentally, particularly for minor matters, use technology, use video conferences, have them potentially in their car or in the station providing testimony. This can't always be done in more serious cases, but a lot of the matters they deal with are fairly minor, and having them sit in a courtroom is not a good use of their time in many cases.

Hon. Wayne Easter: On page nine you mention that in Canada there is minimal related research capacity, no central repository of accessible research information, etc. Are there other countries that we can look at where that kind of system is working well and that we can use as a model in that area?

Mr. Mark Potter: I think, as you heard from Professor Curt Griffiths from Simon Fraser University, who's actually on our steering committee and a very prominent academic in the field of policing in Canada, we are well behind all of the G-8 countries in terms of our research capacity, the infrastructure to support it, and the existence in many countries of repositories.

As mentioned to this committee previously, there is a website in the U.S. run by the Department of Justice called crimesolutions.gov, and it's a tremendously useful and user-friendly site. Basically, if you want to look at crime prevention models, for example, it will give you a long list of all the crime prevention models that exist, both in the United States and elsewhere around the world. Most importantly —and this is where we want to get to ultimately with our index—it will give you information on independent evaluations of those programs. You can look at a program such as the broken windows program in New York, which has been around for quite a while now, and see how effective it is. It has had a lot of attention in terms of some of the very positive outcomes that it's contributed to in the New York area, and it's been applied in many other jurisdictions now. But what is the independent evaluation saying about that and many other programs?

It's got a nice user-friendly format, where if there have been a number of positive evaluations, it will get multiple tick marks and it will be a green sort of emblem, so you know if you're looking to implement a program like that to get at the roots of crime and crime prevention, particularly in crime hot spots, what the tested and true methods are out there. Many police services, particularly the medium and smaller ones, don't know where to turn to find that kind of information. By having a database of information, with contacts, with actual people, they can call up and say, “Look, I read about your program. It's got a lot of positive evaluations, and I'd like to talk to you more about it, so perhaps we could meet.”

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Potter. I appreciate that very much.

We ran a little over on that, so we will now go to Madame Doré Lefebvre, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Potter, it is a pleasure to welcome you to our committee once more. Thank you for coming to answer our questions. I enjoyed listening to your opening remarks.

A number of my questions have to do with those remarks and with what my colleague Mr. Garrison said about First Nations. Let me start there.

Could you tell me if, at the end of the month, First Nations' police associations will be invited to meet with the provincial ministers at their meeting in Whitehorse?

● (1145)

Mr. Mark Potter: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I don't believe they will be there because this is a ministerial meeting of federal-provincial-territorial ministers of public safety and justice. To be completely honest with you, I'm presenting on this topic. I'm not involved in organizing the whole event, and I think there are 30 to 40 agenda items the ministers will be discussing.

I don't believe first nations representatives are actually direct participants in the meeting. However, having said that, I know that particularly in my area and in many others, ministers do look to officials and have the high expectation that they will have engaged with a whole range of communities, including first nations communities when they bring forward proposals. That's often an issue that is raised. I know from previous discussions among ministers that first nations policing is a top-of-mind concern.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

A lot of your opening statement was based on three pillars. For the second one, I noticed, you mentioned new models of community safety. My question is about the funding of that initiative.

Do you have an idea about the type of funding that will be required, given that our police service funding is under specific attack? What do you have in mind when you mention that pillar?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: I think that's a good question, and one that I'm not really in the best position to answer. I can refer to the testimony from Dale McFee, who is now the deputy minister in Saskatchewan for public safety and was the head of the Prince Albert Police Service, the service in Canada that brought that model over from Scotland.

I know from talking to Mr. McFee and reading about the hub and the community mobilization initiative that certainly to start it's not a tremendously expensive undertaking. Really, it requires a police service to commit one or two of your police officers on a regular basis to participate in ongoing meetings with all community and social services agencies. They will meet once, twice a week to review cases, to review situations of at-risk youth, at-risk families, and the kinds of interventions that might be most helpful to those individuals. So it's a couple of individuals from your police service, the time they're spending in these meetings, and some administration or clerical support around that to organize the meetings.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. More fundamentally, these models are about working with communities more directly and more proactively. That ultimately requires considerable resources from the police.

There are the hubs themselves, but then there's the whole philosophy of community and neighbourhood policing and proactive and integrated policing, which requires for many police services quite a shift in their orientation to devote a considerable portion—and I've heard figures of 30% to 40%—of police officers' time to engaging with community members, not to respond to incidents, but just to spend time in the communities talking to members of the community, understanding the challenges they're facing, gathering information on what's happening in the communities and helping them to adapt to some of the challenges they're facing, providing information on social service supports that are available to them and directing them to those agencies. There are various steps, shall we say, in terms of taking a model like the hub model in Saskatchewan and effectively applying it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds maximum.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: This will not be easy to do in 30 seconds.

You said some extremely interesting things about this, Mr. Potter

[*English*]

I'm looking forward to that meeting to see what's going to happen in Whitehorse.

[*Translation*]

Are the provincial public safety ministers at all open to this?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: Absolutely. This will be the third time I've presented to ministers, and they've been tremendously supportive. This is a pretty interesting issue on which ministers and yourselves are, frankly, getting ahead of an important public policy challenge. I think that shows a lot of leadership from all governments and parliamentarians.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Payne, please.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Chair. My question is through you to Mr. Potter.

It's nice to see you back here again, Mr. Potter. It's a really interesting study that we've had here, and we've seen a lot of interesting things from various communities right across the country, and also down south, where we attended as part of our committee.

One of the things I've noticed in my local community that has been reported many times is that the Medicine Hat city police are the second-highest paid in the country, which I find quite outstanding, actually. That obviously relates to a number of questions that we've seen. You've talked a bit about those, that when you talk to these officers they say they get really frustrated at having to go to court and then it's remanded for whatever reason, and they're going back two or three times. And a lot of times this is on overtime. So you're not just talking about regular salary; you're talking whatever it is—time and a half or double time, depending on their circumstances. So certainly some improvements from the court side....

You also talked about getting rid of the silos and working together. I think that's a really important aspect.

However, I want to touch on some of your comments in your opening presentation. You were talking about shared information on policies, practices, the efficiencies, and you did talk about the launch of the index in August. I'm wondering if you have any further thoughts that you wanted to express to us on those particular ideas.

Mr. Mark Potter: Thank you.

I'll start with your first comment. It echoes a number of your colleagues' comments about court time and the efficiency of using officers in that way.

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but the index, the sharing of best practices, can be a tremendously helpful way for all police services to deal with that issue. If there are police services in Canada or elsewhere that have found the right approach to engage with the court system and use their officers' time as efficiently as possible, it's very helpful to share that information so that you don't have every jurisdiction and every police service trying to figure this all out for themselves. We have seen examples...simple matters of establishing liaison with prosecutors and the administration to ensure the scheduling is done in a way that works for both parties. At the national level, there are justice reform initiatives under way to ensure that technology can be more widely used in cases and to allow officers to appear through video conference where that makes sense to do so.

Really, what we're looking at in Canada is recognizing that there are different jurisdictional responsibilities. It's not for the federal government to dictate the operations of particular police services, but I think where it makes sense to share information, to collaborate, and to talk about what's working well in one place or another, it can be tremendously helpful to the policing community.

Frankly, we haven't had the infrastructure to do that in this country. We haven't had the willingness to engage in that kind of sharing. But that's changing. That's one of the big outcomes of the last few years of the summit, this committee's work, the greater public profile around policing costs, and improving efficiency and effectiveness of already very strong police services in this country. How we can continue to meet the high expectations of Canadians and to make policing ever more efficient is ultimately the goal of the strategy.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I understand that through some of these processes, the technology and information sharing, we can save upwards of $1 billion. I'm not sure if that's an appropriate cost, but maybe you could comment on that.

Mr. Mark Potter: I'm not sure anyone has broken down the $12.9 billion that we spend annually on policing, for example, how much of that is officers attending court on overtime or what have you. I haven't seen a study that does that. I think it would be tremendously difficult to break the data down to that level of information. It may exist, and perhaps some police services do track it. Certainly anecdotally we hear, as you've all heard, many examples of police officers spending a lot of time waiting around in courtrooms and nothing happens.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Potter, could you make a quick comment on the funding for youth gang prevention? I believe the funding we put into it was $37.5 million and an ongoing amount of about $7.5 million. How do you see that as being part of this solution that we're looking at?

● (1155)

Mr. Mark Potter: I think the federal government—and, frankly, all governments—has tried to take a balanced approach, whether it's strengthening laws on the one hand or focusing on crime prevention and support to communities on the other.

We have the National Crime Prevention Centre in Canada; I think that's what you were referring to. They have a number of programs. I'm not directly involved in that, so I can't comment on the specific numbers. My colleagues in the Department of Public Safety run that work with a number of NGOs and other community organizations to ensure these programs are available to help at-risk youth and families and put them on the right trajectory, get at the roots of crime, which is ultimately where I think we all want to go.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rousseau, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Potter.

I have two concerns on which I would like your comments. You mentioned the collaboration, the cooperation between all police forces. In my riding, the Border Services Agency, the RCMP, the municipal police force and the Sûreté du Québec often have to cooperate on various activities and when joint action is called for. The people I talk to tell me that they lack the resources to accomplish the tasks that the various police forces should be sharing. They do not have the human resources, or the financial resources to be involved in some situations and to respond to the requests.

Could you comment on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: I think once again I'd make the caveat...and I don't mean to sound unhelpful, but for a federal government official like myself to comment on the operations of particular agencies, whether they're federal or provincial, is not entirely appropriate.

I do know, in talking to many different police services and agencies and provincial and municipal governments, that there's a sense, with the $12.9 billion we're spending annually, that there's a lot of money spent on policing, as well as on border services and elsewhere. The question is more how are we using those resources and ensuring...before you begin asking for additional resources?

We see this particularly in the case of municipalities, where they're regularly going to their police boards and their city councils and saying, we need more resources for this, and increasingly city councils are saying, okay, but we'd like to hear how you're achieving your results with what you have and what you are doing to employ those resources more efficiently and effectively. If you can then demonstrate to them...and Vancouver is another good example of this. When they ran into a fiscal crisis their municipal council pushed back on their increasing requests for resources and more officers, and said, hold on, you need to show us how you are achieving the results with what you already have.

It's about gathering data on results, presenting that to your city council, and ultimately allowing them to make the decision. I know in the case of Vancouver they basically went to their city council and said, look, with the front-line policing resources we have right now we can give you response times to priority one calls of 15 minutes. If you want that response time to be 10 minutes, then you're going to need *x* number of resources. That's a public policy strategic direction decision that a council, a police board, is able to make.

The police can lay out the implications of particular funding situations. The groups you've talked about, for example, I think have a responsibility to go to their funders and say, here's what we're doing, here are the results we're achieving, and here are the things we've done to improve efficiency and effectiveness. If you want us to do more and if you want us to focus on these particular areas, these are the implications and these are the resources we're going to require.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Thank you very much.

Here is my other concern. You said that police officers and police forces are increasingly dealing with unconventional crimes committed by the homeless or by the mentally ill, as well as more and more sophisticated crimes like human trafficking, youth prostitution and cyberbullying. So it is clear that updating the training given to police officers and police forces is all the more important in our modern world.

How can we square that with a new approach to the economics of policing?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: I think you're right. The police are dealing with a tremendous range of crimes and new crimes that are emerging.

● (1200)

The Chair: We've just lost translation for a second. Please give us a moment.

[*Translation*]

It is fine; you can continue.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: You don't have to look too far. I think in the *Globe and Mail* today there's a report from Europe where a non-governmental organization there was essentially using a technique of putting information about child sexual exploitation on line and seeing how many individuals from around the world were accessing that information. They were absolutely startling numbers, the number of people who were going on to that website for the purpose of child sexual exploitation. They were able to link that to individuals in many places, including Canada.

The resources not only...and this is just an NGO, but the police themselves have units that are tracking this sort of behaviour, and it's very complex, very time consuming, requiring technical skills that are often tremendously difficult to develop and then maintain. These are emerging areas that are very important to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Potter and Mr. Rousseau.

Mr. Weston, please.

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Potter, welcome. I'm one of the new members on the committee, and I certainly look forward to playing an active role in the committee. This study is very interesting.

I have a question around the shared forward agenda that you mentioned in your comments today. My question is with respect to what's involved in the agenda. You talk about how it's being developed through collaboration with governments and police associations and whatnot. I guess where I'm going with this is that we all understand that police are being asked to do much more than they were 30 years ago. There are new dimensions in society now that they didn't have to deal with back in those days, 25 to 30 years ago—whether it's Internet crimes or some of the mental health issues you talked about. The police can be spending many hours at hospitals dealing with individuals who have mental health issues.

I hear a lot of people talking about the time police are spending on administrative duties and the time they are spending in courts. Those are issues police had in the past as well. Courtroom time was always an issue for police, to ensure prosecutions were completed. Administrative issues were always there because you want to make sure every detail is recorded for the prosecution.

However, with the shared forward agenda and the talk of collaboration, my mind went to the collaborative care model of health care. When health care providers are dealing with something that is outside of their normal areas of expertise, it's triaged and moved to another area.

Is there any thought given under the shared forward agenda to...I don't want to use the collaborative health care model or a triage model, but to some sort of model like that? If police are dealing with a mental health issue that's outside of the policing realm per se...there are not criminal charges that would be followed up on in that nature. Is there any thought to being able to move this to somebody who is... I don't want to say better suited, but better trained to deal with those issues?

Mr. Mark Potter: I think there has been a lot of progress in this area, but it's mixed. So in dealing with individuals with mental health issues, it's often a two-pronged approach. You've heard from certain police chiefs in this regard. They will go on patrol with a public health nurse. You'll have a police officer and a public health nurse in the car responding to incidents, to allow for the proper engagement with individuals with mental health issues. So there are particular things like that, which frankly, in some police services, have been around for 30 years. Other police services are only just starting to do it. That's why I said there's a bit of a mixed bag.

There's the training that is given to police officers to make them aware of the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, which has grown pretty significantly, both in the basic training and in the refresher training that police get. There are other things that have been happening. For example, in the Yukon, as a result of a particular incident there, they've done a review and made some reforms to their policing system and how they engage with various partners, including mental health. One of them is when you're bringing in an individual who's displaying signs of mental health issues, how do you get them quickly into the health care system?

What has often happened in most jurisdictions is the police will take such an individual to the emergency ward, and because the individual may have the potential for violence, the police are required to remain in the emergency ward. That's the Sudbury example. I was actually on a ride along with RCMP in Whitehorse not too long ago where this exact situation happened, where an individual had to go to the emergency department, and there were five police officers standing around the bed for two hours. This was because of other priorities, and the doctors didn't have a chance to deal with this individual and give them the help they needed.

So what you have—and this is starting to emerge now in the Yukon and elsewhere—are MOUs in place with the health care system that say when we're bringing in certain types of individuals, please let us go to a particular part of the hospital where there are people trained to assess these individuals, determine what condition they're in, and how they can best be helped. The police are then better able to hand them off to a secure, helpful environment for the individual without the police—

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Potter. I appreciate that.

M. Pilon, s'il vous plaît.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Potter.

In your presentation, you say: “The main principles behind the evolving strategy are to cooperate collectively in those areas where it makes sense to do so…and to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach to public safety”.

In your opinion, where does it make sense to do so?

Here is the second part of my question. In my riding, I have 39 cultural communities. Given that each community is different, do you think that there can be a comprehensive and global approach in an environment like that?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: I think we're trying to be very sensitive in developing the strategy to be respectful of the operational decisions particular police services need to make. They need to make those decisions in consultation with their residents. This isn't a matter certainly for the federal government or even for provincial and municipal governments to necessarily dictate. This is something the police, who work very intimately with their communities and know their communities and work with community residents, community groups, community activists, understand and know how best to serve that community. So through the strategy we're operating at a fairly high level in terms of the kinds of actions and collaboration we foresee. Many of these actions are facilitative. They're meant to provide the tools, the information, and the knowledge that allows police services to adapt them and apply them as they see fit.

This isn't a one-size-fits-all strategy. This is giving the tools, the information, to allow particular governments, particular police services, in response to their residents' needs, the right kind of service as efficiently as possible. Through the strategy we are not trying to dictate particular approaches. We're trying to keep this at a fairly high level that will allow that essential operational independence to continue to exist for police services. They can draw on this information as they see fit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: I am new to the committee too. Could you tell me if the province of Québec and the Sûreté du Québec are taking part in the work that is going on?

Mr. Mark Potter: Absolutely.

[*English*]

The agreement and the direction that has been provided by FPT ministers is all ministers, including the ministers of public safety and justice from the Province of Quebec. They were part of that consensus in asking us to hold the summit, develop the index of policing initiatives, and ultimately to bring forward a shared forward agenda or strategy for policing.

I don't want to prejudge what will ultimately be decided by ministers, but I think there's been a tremendous level of collaboration among all governments in dealing with this issue. I think part of that success is the nature of the approach we're taking, which is to be respectful of jurisdictional responsibilities and not develop this in a way that could be perceived or construed as the federal government imposing particular solutions on particular jurisdictions. We've had a very good level of cooperation with all the provinces, including Quebec.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Some of the things you mentioned in your presentation were websites and targeted learning activities. Do they help to bring the crime rate down? In general, do these new technologies give good results?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Potter: I think that's a broad question, and you'd have to look at particular initiatives, particular jurisdictions. Certainly, overall, we're seeing a decline in the reported crime rate right across Canada. That's not necessarily the case in every single jurisdiction and for every single crime. You're seeing some crime spikes, particularly in the west and in the north, in particular areas that are of concern.

In terms of crime prevention models, part of the challenge is that we don't necessarily know what's working and how effectively it's working. This is the research challenge, and ultimately the information-sharing challenge. When there are programs that appear to be generating positive results, do we have the data, do we have the independent evaluation of those to confirm that, yes, that's the right kind of approach? Then, even if you do have the right kind of approach, you don't necessarily simply transfer that directly to some other jurisdiction. You have to take into account the different communities you're dealing with and ensure that you align that approach appropriately with wherever else you may want to apply it.

The Chair: That's it. Thank you.

Colleagues, we have now finished our round of questioning.

At this time, I would like to thank you, Mr. Potter, not just for today but also for the substantive information you've provided to this committee over the number of times you've been here. It's deeply appreciated. On behalf of all the committee, thank you very much.

I'd like to thank my colleagues from all sides of the House for their interventions and their comments today.

We will have a motion for adjournment very shortly, I would expect, but before we do that, I might serve notice to the committee that at our Thursday meeting, the chair has an intention to reserve the last few minutes for future business. I just bring that to your attention so that you can possibly come prepared for that, should the committee decide that's equitable, at that time.

I'm open for a motion. It is moved by Mr. Norlock and seconded by Mr. Garrison.

We are adjourned to the call of the chair.