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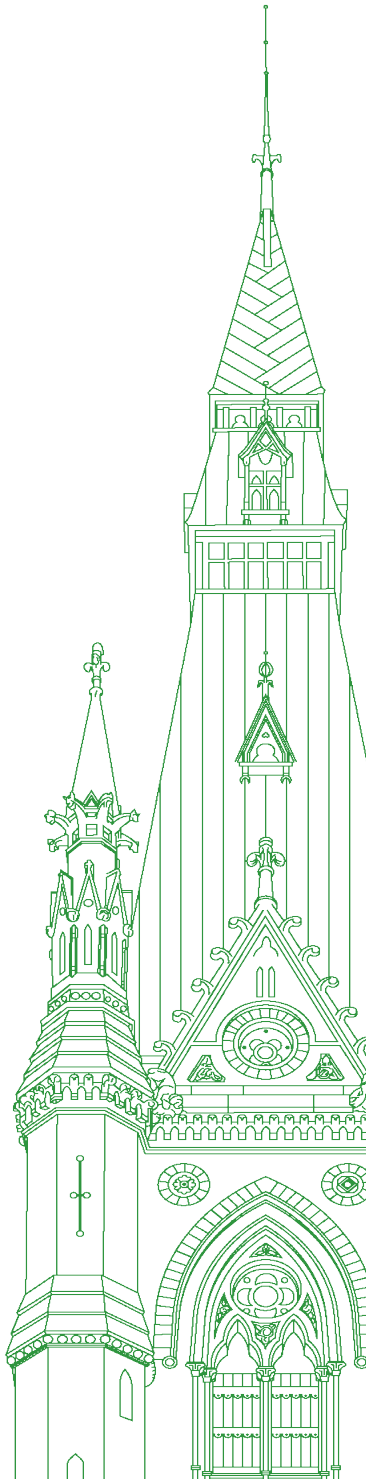

Chair: The Honourable John McKay

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, July 23, 2020

● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome.

I am hearing an echo in my ear. Are we good now? Okay.

This is meeting number eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. When we initially set up this meeting, we thought it was going to be an in-person meeting. Fortunately, on Monday, we were able to change that to be a virtual meeting. I anticipate that for the foreseeable future, the public safety committee will be having virtual meetings rather than in-person meetings.

I would ask for a little forgiveness and understanding among colleagues today, as well as those who are witnesses and those who are watching. We may have a few glitches. Probably the major source of glitches will be the chair.

As you are speaking, if you plan to use an alternate language, you'll notice there's an icon at the bottom of the screen: English, French, and back and forth. If you decide to switch languages, just pause for a second.

Please wait until I recognize you by name, and then you can click on your microphone. I've already established that I can't cut off your microphone, which is really quite regrettable, as far as I'm concerned.

As a reminder, all commentary should be addressed through the chair.

I will say to the witnesses, if you keep an eye on the chair, I'll try to signal when your time is up. I don't wish to interrupt you, but I'm going to be.... The tyranny of the time is really quite regrettable.

When you're not speaking, mute your mike. We're obviously encouraging the use of headsets, and it looks as if almost everybody has a headset.

To begin, we have three witnesses: the Assembly of First Nations and....

I see that my colleague Jack has a motion, which we did discuss earlier. I'm looking for Jack to read that motion quickly and to look for immediate consensus on that motion.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Yes, Chair, thank you.

I think you will find that there is consensus to support this motion. I think it's been circulated in both languages. It reads as follows:

> That, in relation to the committee's study of systemic racism in policing services in Canada and notwithstanding the motion adopted on February 20, 2020 concerning the questioning of witnesses, for the remainder of this study the rotation for questions be conducted as follows:
>
> Round one—six minutes per party in the usual order (Conservatives, Liberals, Bloc Québécois and NDP) for a total of 24 minutes, followed by round two—three minutes each for the Conservatives, Liberals, Conservatives, Liberals and 1.5 minutes each for the Bloc and the NDP for a total of 15 minutes and a grand total of 60 minutes (21 minutes having been allocated for opening statements by witnesses).

Thank you.

The Chair: The motion is on the floor.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Does the clerk have to do that formally, or can we just raise our hands?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-Marie David): I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, we're supposed to do all votes as recorded votes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: A roll call.

The Chair: Do we have to record every vote?

The Clerk: Yes. I'll try to do that quickly.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: The motion is adopted. Thank you.

I see that we are running 10 minutes past the hour already, so I'm giving notice to the folks who run these meetings that we will be running 10 minutes past 12 o'clock.

Our first witness is from the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations. He is Regional Chief Terry Teegee. I see him online. Representing ITK, we have Natan Obed, president. As well, we have Aluki Kotierk, from Nunavut Tunngavik.

Chief Teegee, you have the floor for seven minutes. Thank you.

● (1110)

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee (Regional Chief, British Columbia Assembly of First Nations): Thank you.

I just want to acknowledge the territory that I'm on right now, the Shuswap territory in British Columbia.

Seeing that I only have seven minutes, I just want to thank everybody for this very important matter in terms of policing. I think, during this pandemic since March, we've seen a lot of situations where many first nations have been adversely affected by policing, whether it was the three in Winnipeg, Chantel Moore on a wellness check in New Brunswick or Mr. Levi in New Brunswick as well. I myself have a family member, Everett Riley Patrick, who died in custody in Prince George, British Columbia.

Going forward, I do have a presentation. It was quite lengthy, and it really talked about the history of policing, not only in British Columbia but, I suppose, Canada itself.

I just want to move right to the recommendations, which, I think, are quite important. I have 14 recommendations that came from our organizations. I just want to note, too, that, as the regional chief of British Columbia, I hold this file for justice, as well as Ghislain Picard. He's the regional chief for Quebec and Labrador.

The first recommendation is really to accelerate federal action on the calls to justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The federal government finalized the report last year and promised an action plan within a year. That year has passed, and right now we really need those calls to justice implemented. There were well over 231 recommendations.

Recommendation number two is working with first nations on a legislative framework to support first nations-led policing with the proper financial resources to support self-determining efforts of first nations policing services. Recently we heard from the federal government that there is a promise to go from program funding to essential services funding, but it has to be much more than that, and more so for first nations that are asserting their sovereignty and their self-determination in terms of policing. There are tripartite agreements with many first nations and also with first nations that have treaties, and those need to be finalized in terms of making it clear how those laws are implemented. Really, I think creating a better relationship with federal and provincial governments is required.

Recommendation three is federal and provincial support for first nations' restorative justice initiatives and respect for the jurisdiction that arises from such initiatives. Prior to colonization, many first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples had their own model of policing and their own laws. They asserted their laws, and those laws need to be upheld.

Recommendation four is to immediately establish an independent review of the RCMP's operational practices involving wellness checks that provides recommendations for reforms. As expounded in point five, police are ill-equipped to deal with sensitive situations involving wellness checks. An independent review is needed to make recommendations on how other services, like mental health support, homelessness and other social work services, can be addressed without the police, and more importantly, in terms of mental health, it's really required there.

Recommendation five is redirecting fiscal resources from militarized policing to much-needed and more effective social supports such as mental health support, homelessness support and social work support that do not require police presence.

Recommendation six is the implementation of zero-tolerance policies on the use of excessive force.

● (1115)

Recommendation seven is for a review of the RCMP Act to include providing more power to a civilian oversight body and providing provisions that clearly state first nations' jurisdiction in matters of policing.

Recommendation eight is to develop legislation that outlaws white supremacist ideologies, while simultaneously increasing the role of the Canadian Human Rights Commission to deal with the private matters involving racist hate speech and action.

Recommendation nine is for greater accountability for the protection and respect of the fundamental human rights of first nations, including the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Recommendation 10 is to increase the use of police body cameras in first nations communities and access to video records.

Recommendation 11 is to enhance de-escalation and implicit bias training, including cross-cultural training.

Recommendation 12 calls for recruitment and promotion of first nations within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Recommendation 13 is to change the name of Canada's national police force to police service—it's not a “force”, but should be a “service”—to signal to the rest of Canada that violence towards first nations and other racialized groups is no longer tolerated.

Recommendation 14 is to create a national first nations justice strategic framework, action plan and commitments, led by first nations with the full support and partnership of Canada and the provinces.

For British Columbia, we have a British Columbia first nations justice strategy that involves justice not only within the province of British Columbia, but nationally. I believe we're the only province and region that has a strategic plan. Thanks are due to our chair, Doug White, who's on this call right now, and our B.C. First Nations Justice Council for developing that plan. We need more like these.

Currently, we are working on a proposal to the federal government, and certainly we need support from other regions. We're out there soliciting other regions and other provinces' first nations to say what they would see strategically in a national justice strategy.

I think it really involves policing. For many years, since colonization began, the police force was used to take our people off the land. More recently, with the advent of the residential school policies, many of our children were taken from our homes and brought to residential schools.

In my language, Dakelh, the Carrier language, we call the RCMP *nilhchuk-un*, which, interpreted in our language, is “those who take us away”. Really, it was the RCMP who took our children away. In many respects, that's the way we still see the RCMP—as we've seen even during this pandemic—because of the many instances of excessive use of force on our indigenous people across this country. There definitely needs to be systemic change, away from very punitive policies towards indigenous peoples and racialized minorities in Canada.

Here, what we're looking at is more restorative justice and a call to look towards rehabilitation and towards alternatives to jails. In Canada and British Columbia, many first nations lead statistically in terms of incarceration rates and also in terms of those who have died during custody.

Right now, policing is seen as mainly a program fund, although Minister Blair has promised us right now that it will become more essential services funding. That is a positive move, but I think it needs to be more than that. You'll definitely hear from other indigenous leaders in this presentation calling for the same thing. We definitely need a change in policing in this country that we call Canada.

With that, I'd like to thank you all for listening to my presentation today. I look forward to the other presenters here today.

● (1120)

Mahsi cho, thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Teegee.

I inadvertently said to Chief Teegee that he had seven minutes. Actually, national groups have 10 minutes, but Chief Teegee got his full 10 minutes regardless.

Our next presenters are Natan Obed and Aluki Kotierk. You have 10 minutes.

Who is speaking first?

Mr. Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to see everyone. *Ublaahatkut*, good morning.

I'll be sharing my time with President Kotierk.

The Inuit Nunangat is the homeland for Inuit. It encompasses 51 communities spanning four regions: in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

We, as Inuit, disproportionately experience police violence compared to most other Canadians, as well as a host of challenges in accessing justice. Police violence isn't just an issue unto itself; it is part of a larger systemic issue in relation to social inequity. Things such as housing, mental health care, access to education, employment, poverty, all these things have to be discussed in relation to police violence as well.

We see police violence through the high rate of police-related deaths in the communities in comparison to other regions of Canada. Although aggregated data is not available for all four Inuit regions, and also not available for Inuit living outside of Inuit Nunangat, what we know paints a distressing picture of the systemic nature of police violence and discrimination against many of our communities.

There were 16 police-related deaths in the last 20 years. Nunavut's overall per capita rate of police-related deaths since 1999 is more than nine times higher than that of Ontario, and about three times higher than that of both Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

The situation in Nunavik is also grim. Between July 2014 and October 2018 alone, eight Inuit were killed and at least four injured by the Kativik Regional Police Force. Between 2016 and 2018, the KRPF was involved in about 10% of all cases of police-related deaths or injuries in the province, or 55 times that of the Montreal police force. The situation for Inuit in the Northwest Territories and Nunatsiavut, as well as for those living outside Inuit Nunangat, is less clear.

What is clear is that systemic racism, and racism itself, kills. The police force is largely itinerant. They don't have a clear connection to community, and there are very few police officers who are Inuit. This leads to the types of staggering figures that I just discussed with you.

Action is required to curb these disturbing trends, and these actions should include a systematic, independent review of the policing practices of the RCMP and the KRPF. In consideration of that action, Inuit participation in the construction of the governance of that review should be first and foremost. We are tired of being left on the sidelines when there are reviews, because in the end, our views and our perspectives are always at risk of being drowned out by other considerations.

Buying cameras and other measures should be taken to enhance transparency and accountability within law enforcement. Greater recruitment and retention of Inuit and Inuktitut speakers in law enforcement is necessary to build trust and improve communication between Inuit and law enforcement. Aggregated Inuit-specific data from across Inuit Nunangat, as well as outside Inuit Nunangat, is required to more fully understand and address police-related violence against Inuit.

I'll hand the rest of my time over to President Kotierk.

● (1125)

Ms. Aluki Kotierk (President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): *Qujannamiik Natan. Ullukuut.*

An imbalance of power and control has characterized the relationship between the RCMP and Nunavut Inuit since the relationship began. This is well documented through the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, which describes the relationship between 1940 and 1975. The RCMP came to our homelands as agents of the federal government, not only as agents of change, agents of colonialism, but also with the self-interested view of a country that needed to assert Arctic sovereignty.

There is no doubt that the relationship between Nunavut Inuit and the RCMP is complex and strained. The RCMP was instrumental in relocating Inuit families into communities; the RCMP was instrumental in sending Inuit children to residential schools; the RCMP was instrumental and in the slaughter of Inuit sled dogs.

I'll quote John Amagoalik in speaking about how his family was moved from Inukjuak in Northern Quebec, Nunavik to the High Arctic in Nunavut:

> I think it is important for people to understand that when the RCMP made a request to you in those days, it was seen as something like an order. You are ordered to do this. The RCMP officers had a lot of power. They could put you in jail. That's the way they were viewed in those days. A request from the police was taken very, very seriously.

Today, many of the social and economic challenges experienced by Inuit are rooted in the loss of power and control caused by much of the colonial relationship. Due to the scarcity of mental health services and supports, the RCMP is often the first stop for Nunavut Inuit to get access to care, yet care is often not received. Instead, Inuit are targets of excessive force in interactions with the RCMP.

As Natan pointed out, since 1999 there have been at least 15 deaths in Nunavut at the hands of the RCMP. The RCMP does not understand our culture, nor does it understand our language, as demonstrated by the ratio of Inuit to non-Inuit officers in Nunavut.

No wonder there is a relationship of distrust between Nunavut Inuit and the RCMP. If in fact the purpose of the RCMP is to serve and protect, the onus and responsibility is on the RCMP to build the trust in our Inuit communities. There needs to be a trauma-informed approach that recognizes that in very recent history, Inuit have experienced a shift in power and authority, and that there are reasons why there are social ills in our communities.

There needs to be an independent oversight model that monitors the behaviour of the RCMP and its interaction with Inuit. There need to be more Inuit RCMP officers. There needs to be better cultural training for RCMP officers who will be working in our Inuit communities. In order to nurture and strengthen community trust or community relationships, RCMP officers need to stay in our communities longer so they become part of our communities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

You still have two minutes left, if there is anything else that needs to be said by either you or Mr. Obed.

● (1130)

Mr. Natan Obed: I'm fine with going into the questions.

The Chair: Okay, with that, we will go into the questions.

Our first six minutes go to Mr. Vidal. After that, we have Ms. Khera, Madame Michaud and Ms. Qaqqaq.

Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to join your committee today, and I thank my colleagues for allowing me to be here.

I also want to thank the witnesses. It's great to have you here, and it's great to hear your testimony and input into this very important matter.

I heard much, from each of you, about the importance of relationships. A couple of you at least talked about service rather than force, and that kind of language. I appreciate that.

As the former mayor of a small city in Saskatchewan, I can say that we had a unique policing situation, in that we shared a detachment. We shared our police service in our little city with the surrounding rural municipality and two first nation communities. There was a very obvious correlation between the relationship, or the rapport, that our community partners had with our commanding officer and how that affected the overall relationship with the service.

One of the highlights we had in our little community, and our community's relationship with the RCMP, was that at one time we asked them—in their annual performance planning cycle—to place a priority on promoting relationships and promoting the good things they do. We found that to be very effective for the community partners of the city, the rural municipality, the first nations communities and the RCMP, as it turned into a positive exercise in building relationships.

I'd like to give you all an opportunity to speak to this if you could. To each of you: Would you offer, or could you discuss, any best practices or any experiences you've had in your past relationships with the RCMP that could be a lesson for all of us across the country to use in improving that relationship in that spirit of service, rather than force?

The Chair: Are you directing that to Chief Teegee first?

Mr. Gary Vidal: To Chief Teegee and President Obed.... I would like the opportunity to have all of them answer that, if we could.

The Chair: Okay.

I'd just remind witnesses to direct their remarks through the chair.

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for that question, Mr. Vidal. I think the example you gave of a small community is a perfect example of how the RCMP needs to relate to the governance.

For my first nations community.... I am from the Takla Lake First Nation. We have three police officers in our territory. There is, for the most part, a good relationship with our chief and council and our community, including adopting some of those police officers into our potlatch system and adopting some of them into the Caribou Clan.

The other example I have is in the Prince George area, where we have created a good relationship with the high-level superintendents. It really began with Brenda Butterworth-Carr, who is a woman of first nations descent. She worked in Ottawa for a while, and now works for the provincial government in policing.

I still have a good relationship with the superintendents, but even though on a very high level we have good relationships with many political people, it doesn't translate to those police officers who are on the beat. There are still high levels of incarceration and death rates in Prince George, going back to Clayton Willey in 2003, a Wet'suwet'en man, Dale Culver, in 2017, and more recently my cousin, Everett Riley Patrick, in April.

We could have a great relationship at the very highest levels, but if it isn't translating down to the police officers, it's not going to create the change we need. More often than not, we're seeing deaths in large municipalities like Winnipeg. We have many other reports, like the Frank Paul inquiry in Vancouver. In the Oka crisis, in that municipality, the use of force by many of those police officers militarized and brought in the Oka crisis 30 years ago.

As you can tell, we can have great relationships at a high level, but if they don't translate down to that level, we're going to have a really tough time.

Thank you.

● (1135)

The Chair: You have roughly a minute left.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Could President Obed speak, possibly?

Mr. Natan Obed: Thank you.

In my personal work experience, when I was an employee of Nunavut Tunngavik, I was involved in the creation of the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy. At that time, the commander of the V Division, Steve McVarnock, sat in and participated and we had the RCMP as a partner in the creation of the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy. It was one of the few times that I have had positive experiences with the RCMP as an institution. It was remarkable to me how different our relationship was in relation to most other interactions.

I also want to just highlight the reports of the Nishnawbe Aski police force and the stark contrast of their record serving first nations people in Ontario [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] community from the results and the stats that we have here today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vidal and Mr. Obed.

Our next six minutes are for Madame Khera.

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you, everyone, for joining us and for your testimonies.

Perhaps I'll start with Chief Teegee. I was reading one of your interviews. You've stated—and rightfully so—that if it was up to you, there needs to be a systemic overhaul of the policing system, whether it is the RCMP or municipal police. I agree. I think the numbers, the stories and your testimony speak for themselves, whether it is the incarceration of indigenous, Black and racialized Canadians in prison or the use of force, including fatal force, within policing. Those are exactly the issues we're looking at as we navigate this study.

From your view, what issues do you see as the most pressing in addressing systemic racism? What specific measures need to be taken? Can you perhaps elaborate on what should be the first thing that needs to be addressed and prioritized?

I'll look to you, Chief Teegee, and then I'll perhaps get the others to also comment briefly.

Thank you.

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: Thank you for that question.

At this moment, what we really need to change, in terms of the overhaul for policing, is in large municipalities. It is the help that many of the social organizations need. A good example, if you look at Winnipeg, is the poor side of town. In Vancouver, it's Downtown Eastside. Many of those places need the social help for homelessness. They need the help for addictions and mental health. In terms of policing, many police forces—whether municipal or the RCMP—are not trained to deal with those situations and they are not trained to do wellness checks.

Right now, when we're talking about an overhaul of the policing system, there certainly needs to be change in terms of that relationship with first nations people. We need systemic changes where there's really a recognition that not only the laws of colonial Canada, but also the laws of indigenous peoples and the laws of our people need to be upheld. Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples needs to be within policies such as the RCMP Act or the police act. I think that can be changed right away. The minimum sentencing can be changed by Minister Lametti.

I think those things can be changed right now, but systemic change and the overhaul.... I think perhaps that's going to be a long journey. Certainly, we need to be looking at other organizations and other first nations, Inuit and Métis for their inclusion and their views on that as well.

Thank you.

● (1140)

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you.

President Obed, would you like to comment?

Mr. Natan Obed: Very quickly, I think what we're seeing is policing through stereotypes. Without a relationship between the RCMP and the community, Inuit aren't seen as people, but we're seen through all the negative lenses that perhaps general Canadian society thinks of when they think of Inuit and what it's like to police Inuit, but really, the RCMP are there to work with the community on a shared set of orders and controls that are a part of our society, not necessarily a part of the RCMP doing something or not doing something.

What we see is the outcome, which is overpolicing and underpolicing, with excessive force being used. Then also, when murdered and missing indigenous women and girls issues are handled by the RCMP, we see a complete under-policing when it comes to ensuring that women are kept safe and that the files, once they are opened, are handled appropriately over time.

These things happen because we just don't have a relationship and we don't also have Inuit-specific control over policing in our communities. Those are the things that need to change.

The Chair: You have approximately a minute left.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you.

My next question is actually for Ms. Kotierk.

You've also mentioned in an interview, I think just recently, that leaders in Nunavut have requested that the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP conduct a full systemic review of policing in the territory after, I believe, it was 30 cases that have emerged involving allegations of police brutality and misconduct. I know these allegations are coming from Inuit women who have complained about the RCMP response to domestic violence and sexual assault calls, as well as the treatment in jail cells.

Can you tell us briefly about the situation and perhaps update us on the status of the request and the review?

The Chair: That's a very important question, and regrettably, she's left you about 15 seconds to answer it, but could you take a stab at it, please?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Very briefly, I will just comment that the Government of Nunavut has indicated that they are looking at an oversight model, which is encouraging. As well, and what is not so encouraging, is that the Minister of Justice for the Government of Nunavut has indicated that there isn't systemic racism in Nunavut, and I disagree with that. It's very interesting to see the mixed messages coming from the Government of Nunavut, and we will see what that results in.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm not sure what happened there, but I appear to be staring at a blank screen. On the assumption that I'm the only one staring at a blank screen, I'm going to ask Madam Michaud for her next six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for their testimony.

Figures show us that few people from indigenous and Inuit communities are in police services. So one solution would be to ensure that there are more. You touched on that a little, Mr. Obed. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in particular has put in place initiatives, such as the Inuit cadet development program, for young high school graduates who would like to pursue a career in policing.

However, there seems to be some sort of prejudice that indigenous or Inuit youth would, in a way, be betraying their community by joining the police because of the colonial history of policing. That is what we have heard from the communities themselves.

Is that something you see in the community? Does it hamper people's willingness to become involved in police work?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll just give some clarity on the statistics as we know them.

As of September 2019, three out of 131 RCMP regular officers in Nunavut were Inuit. At the same time, only three officers in Nunavik out of 70 were Inuit as well—we don't have the data for the other two regions—which just shows you how few Inuit are in the RCMP.

As somebody who has known many friends who have thought of being RCMP officers or who were RCMP officers at one time, I know that it's really challenging to police your own community, especially considering the foundation of the rules that are set out for you to follow. Also, the real challenge is in relation to an itinerant workforce. The RCMP is structured so that people move around. If you're somebody who is from a certain community in one of our regions, it's not a lifestyle that many Inuit want to pursue, especially if they want to stay in their home communities.

There are a number of very clear barriers that are in place to ensure that there is a larger police workforce. Absolutely, it is very challenging for Inuit to be RCMP officers in their home communities or across Inuit Nunangat. There are a lot of challenges to that. I'm very sympathetic to those who are trying and who have succeeded to be RCMP officers serving their people.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I understand from your comments that there are many obstacles. There is a lack of trust in the communities towards RCMP officers. What could be done, in concrete terms, to encourage people to join? That might be a solution.

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: I apologize. If that was a follow-up question for me directly, I didn't hear the interpretation of it.

The Chair: Yes, I think you're correct. I didn't hear the interpretation as well.

Madame Michaud, could you...?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: But I have the French channel on. Is it working now?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, it's working now.

Repeat the question, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Obed, you say there are a lot of obstacles preventing young people from joining, that it's difficult for them to do so. We are talking about a general lack of trust in the communities towards RCMP officers or police services.

What could be done, in concrete terms, to remove these barriers and facilitate the process?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: I'm referring back to the first recommendation that I put forward: A thorough review, an independent review, a review that also holds Inuit governance and Inuit as central to policing in Inuit Nunangat would be a great place to start. There could be an explicit consideration of the human resources aspect of this, but also a fundamental review of the relationship that we need to have. The connection between the RCMP and the community needs to transform. As it transforms, I think more Inuit would see a future not only as RCMP officers but also in working in administrative jobs and other [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much.

You also talked about officers who use body cameras. Minister Blair has shown some openness to the idea of making them more accessible to communities. Do you think that would be a good thing? How could the information be made accessible to the communities?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: President Kotierk, do you want to take this?

The Chair: Madame Kotierk, go ahead.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Is this for me?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I know that in Nunavik, in northern Quebec, the police force currently uses body cameras. It's something that's been called for in Nunavut as something that could be used as a tool. I think it would be very helpful. I don't think it's the only way to make things better between the RCMP and the Inuit. In fact, I just want to point out that Nunavut is quite unique among all other jurisdictions in that it's the only jurisdiction that has an indigenous majority population that speaks a first language that is neither of the two official languages of Canada. That makes it extremely important that the police officers and the employees of these police officers are able to understand Inuit culture and are able to understand Inuktitut.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I think that when the RCMP first came to our homelands, they relied heavily on special constables who were Inuit who were able to provide not only interpretation through language, but also cultural interpretation.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave Madam Michaud's question there.

Again, I encourage witnesses to occasionally look at the chair, and I'll try to give you a signal as to whether it's being wound up or not.

We move to the next six minutes with Madam Qaqqaq.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): *Matna*, Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here to share your wonderful knowledge.

Here's a shout-out to the IT team and translation for always keeping us on track.

I would like to point out as well that it is President Kotierk and President Obed. Her title is president, just as Natan's is.

My questions are for both of them. I'm going to start with President Kotierk.

Do you think that the relationship between the RCMP and Inuit has ever been a good one?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I think it has always been strained.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Do you think that systemic racism is present within the RCMP?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Systemic racism is rampant in Nunavut, and it's not limited solely to the RCMP.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you.

Aluki, President Kotierk, can you talk to the role that the RCMP has played from a standpoint of what that profession and what that uniform can symbolize to Inuit?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: In terms of the relationship, I spoke briefly to the historical context. When I look at the RCMP, I see it as just one aspect of a whole justice system. It's not enough for us to focus solely on the RCMP; we need to look at ways in which we're addressing the social ills of our community in a holistic way, in an Inuit way, that is focused on the person and addressing the needs that they have, such as mental health issues, and I think that would be something that would be worth looking at.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you, President Kotierk.

In about a minute, can you talk a little bit to the historical aspects that you touched on, such as some things the members could expect to find in the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, for example?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Qujannamiik*

I think it's a very complex relationship between Nunavut Inuit and the RCMP, one in which the RCMP relied heavily on Inuit because they were not able to live in our Arctic homelands, did not know what to eat, did not know how to keep warm and did not know how to transport themselves, so Inuit were the experts in that and very helpful. At the same time, they played a very authoritative role and were very intimidating, so many Inuit, similar to the quote I read from John Amagoalik, were intimidated and felt that they had no choice but to listen to the authority of the RCMP.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Great. *Matna*, President Kotierk.

President Obed, oftentimes Inuit aren't necessarily on national headlines, and we have been having this discussion, especially around the Black Lives Matter movement, that indigenous lives matter. We have been seeing those kinds of things throughout the country. Can you talk to specific examples? I'm going to use one to kick us off.

For example, in Kinngait we saw that the video circulated and got national attention. Could you give us some more recent examples of those interactions between RCMP and Inuit that result in death?

● (1155)

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes, very recently in Nunavut there was the example of a man who was fatally shot in his home in front of his common-law spouse, and he was still handcuffed after he was shot and was not provided medical attention right away. These are the stories that we hear. Unarmed Inuit who don't have guns are being killed by RCMP officers. Sometimes these conversations come to me from friends and family, and sometimes Inuit reach out to me to talk about the things that they want to see change.

It's great to see a national conversation happening about the things that we experience every day, especially the violence that Inuit have experienced. Of course, there needs to be a consideration of all aspects of why these things happen, but very clearly, racism kills. The misunderstandings, the cultural differences or lack of respect lead to this, and ultimately, I just can't accept that I live in a country where part of our government services is killing our people.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: *Matna*, President Obed. I have about 30 seconds before the next question.

We talk about defunding the police, and I think that scares some people. Instead of raising it that way, what other services and resources should we be looking at investing in for Inuit?

Mr. Natan Obed: We need to empower communities. We need to end systemic racism, but that also starts with social inequity. We need to ensure that we have relationships within our communities that uphold our traditions, our laws, the way we interact within our society. That is the first place we need to start.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to the three-minute round. First is Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will be brief because three minutes is very little.

Chief Teegee, can you tell us about the retention rate? Are there any statistics available on the average length of time RCMP officers stay in the communities? I am sure it affects the relationships with the people in the community.

Do you have access to those figures, and is it true that the officers are just passing through?

[*English*]

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: No, I don't have any of those statistics about how long they stay. Just as an example, for my first nations community, it's really newly trained police officers. They are required to stay, I believe, for two years. Some stay longer because they appreciate the community, but I don't have the stats on that. Sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Obed, what about you?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Aside from the statistics that I presented around examples of police violence, I would have to get back to the committee. On the statistics that we do have about retention and the length of stay for RCMP officers, I'm sure that this information is available. I pledge to follow up with the committee to get you that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much.

Chief Teegee, according to Professor Leuprecht from the Royal Military College of Canada, the RCMP Commissioner, Ms. Lucki, has over 180 reports from the RCMP Civilian Review and Complaints Commission waiting on her desk to be processed.

What are your expectations regarding those outstanding complaints?

● (1200)

[*English*]

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: I think these complaints need to be addressed, and I'm sure it's much more than that, because quite frankly I know there are complaints throughout this country. I really think it speaks to the racism that exists within policing and also this country in general.

We've seen in many organizations here in British Columbia that it's within the health system, and that's really something that needs to be addressed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold. You only have about 20 seconds left.

With that, we'll go to—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Obed, do you think we should act more quickly too?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sure that Mr. Obed does think we should be taking action much more quickly, but he's not unfortunately going to be able to answer that question. I'm sure he'll be able to work it into some other answer.

With that, we go to Mr. Anandasangaree for three minutes, please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This question is for all three, because all three have spoken about the need for self-determination in policing. I believe Chief Teegee was talking about self-determination as part of policing led by first nations, and President Obed spoke about the RCMP and the need for Inuit-specific control.

Can you elaborate on what that means to both of you? I know time is very limited, so maybe you could stay within a minute each.

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: I think that the goal is really to assert our first nations rights within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, our sovereignty and self-determination, in terms of our view of...I suppose the colonial word is “policing”. For first nations, it's more towards upholding what we see as the laws from the big house or from the potlatch house.

Mr. Natan Obed: In each of the four Inuit Nunangat regions there will be different paths forward in self-determination and policing. Some of our land claim agreements have self-government appendages that allow for Inuit to provide policing directly and some don't, but definitely we need to have the right to have these conversations and the ability to be at the table. We'll get away from saying that the RCMP must do this or the RCMP must do that, or Canada must do this or that, and get towards the place where our rights are upheld and our self-determination leads when it comes to policing.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe that's my time.

The Chair: You still have 45 seconds left.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: President Kotierk, are you able to comment on this as well?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Similar to what I said in terms of the 25 communities in Nunavut, I think there's an opportunity to have the force work with our communities and employ people, whether they're officers or not, similar to the way in which we had special constables. I think that would help enrich the relationship and garner more trust between Nunavut Inuit and the RCMP.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Uppal, you have three minutes, please.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Thank you.

What more can we do to attract more indigenous communities to the police forces themselves, whether it's self-determined police forces or the RCMP?

Mr. Natan Obed: Perhaps I'll start.

As the RCMP is an extension of the federal government, in many cases all the different human resource requirements and the training become barriers for Inuit to become RCMP officers or to work within the RCMP administrative structure itself.

Our language, Inuktitut, is not valued within any of the human resource skill sets that are required or valued within the RCMP. Also, our skill sets beyond language and a closeness to our communities have really no bearing on any of the training, the recruitment and retention, or the ability to succeed as an officer, other than in the stark day-to-day realities of an Inuk being an RCMP officer in an Inuit community. It matters, but it doesn't necessarily matter in any human resource context.

That needs to change. We need to reform the way in which we think about those people who are suitable to be RCMP officers in our communities.

● (1205)

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: Overall, just in general, we need our own police forces. There's one that exists here in British Columbia, and there are many others in Ontario and other provinces.

In terms of involvement and retention within the RCMP, there's a pending class action lawsuit in regard to racist and sexist acts in terms of the treatment of not only indigenous women but just of indigenous people. I think that is really indicative of the organization itself, so in terms of retention, that definitely needs to change to deal with the racism that exists within the RCMP.

Also, more often that not, in terms of the ability of first nations people to get through testing and just get involved within the RCMP, there are always barriers, and that's really why I see there's sometimes some struggle to get first nations people in the RCMP.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Uppal.

Madam Damoff, you have three minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses. I want to acknowledge that I am on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people today.

President Obed, I first want to thank you for your always thoughtful testimony. You're very knowledgeable but also very thoughtful in the way that you present.

We're reviewing first nations policing, and I'm wondering what your thoughts are on expanding that to include Inuit. Right now there's no agreement with Nunavut for their own police services. Rather than relying on the RCMP, you would be looking at your own police service. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that.

Mr. Natan Obed: I don't have any specific position, as in ITK we haven't considered the issue within our board structure. I would like to pass it to President Kotierk for that. I would say, however, yes, absolutely; in a distinctions-based way, there needs to be a consideration of Inuit policing at the larger federal levels and there need to be reforms in the way in which policing happens in those communities.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Qujannamiik*, Natan.

We know that the current way in which policing is delivered is not working. The excessive force and the number of Inuit who are dying at the hands of the RCMP is of concern. I think any consideration for us to look at how things can be done differently would be very useful.

Qujannamiik.

Ms. Pam Damoff: My next question is for you, Chief Teegee. One of the concerns I have as we're looking at a new model is training. Training officers in the old way will not present new results. I'm wondering what your thoughts are in terms of training for first nations policing and whether there should be a separate indigenous police training academy.

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: I don't know if it should be separate. It depends on the situation, with perhaps it could be separate if there is training needed to go into really remote and rural areas, but I think overall what we're seeing is that the incarceration and deaths of first nations, Inuit and Métis people are in urban areas. Those are the officers who really need training for mental health and addictions, and also perhaps training from an indigenous point of view to really have some empathy toward indigenous people, to understand our lived life and what we have been experiencing since colonization.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Damoff, as per the motion, there are still....

I want to beg the forgiveness of our staff, but we are going to stretch it another three minutes. We'll give a minute and a half to Madame Michaud and a minute and a half to Madam Qaqqaq.

Go ahead, Madame Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When I hear testimony such as the one about a man who was handcuffed and shot, it seems clear to me that the RCMP or its officers are not applying the incident management intervention model, which states that the use of force must be commensurate with the individual's level of resistance. We know that use of force reports are completed. In other words, paperwork is filled out after those types of situations. Then it seems that nothing else is done.

Chief Teegee, could you comment on the follow-up that should be done within the police services themselves to ensure that these extreme situations do not happen again. One of the things you talked about was accountability.

[*English*]

Vice-Chief Terry Teegee: Really importantly, there needs to be an independent review, a truly independent review, not necessarily police reviewing police but a civilian review that looks at the actions of many police officers. Just in general, I suppose the training needs to be reviewed as well in terms of how they approach certain situations that involve addictions and perhaps mental health.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Michaud.

Go ahead, Madam Qaqqaq.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: *Matna*. Thank you, Chair, and a quick shout-out to you. You've been doing great with time today. I really appreciate it.

For context, as well, for the rest of the committee, when we're talking about Nunavut, we're talking about a population that is just a bit bigger than Charlottetown, P.E.I. I want to put that into context, especially when we're talking about numbers.

We know that since 2010 in Nunavut, the rate of police-related deaths is 14.35 times that of Ontario. We know that suicide is nine times the rate. We know that women in the north experience violence at three times the rate of the rest of Canada.

My question is for President Kotierk.

We saw in June that this government has delayed their timeline in response to murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. What do you think that says about the relationship the federal government has to Inuit and majority Inuit communities, and what does that say about the value in that relationship and the value of Inuit lives?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Matna.*

I think it signals very publicly the message that it's not a priority, despite the very public inquiry and the platitudes of how important it is and how the relationship with indigenous peoples is more important than other relationships.

I liken it to a recent document that I read here in Nunavut, where similarly the RCMP are called by Inuit women because they're seeking assistance in a violent situation and the RCMP do not show up. It feels in that sort of vein, that all the information is now publicly available, and yet it's not important enough to action it.

The Chair: With that, we're going to have to bring this session to a close.

I want to thank the members and the witnesses for their indulgence with respect to the incompetence of the chair. My poor colleagues on the committee will be exposed to more incompetence over the course of time.

President Obed, President Kotierk, Chief Teegee, you have launched this inquiry very well, and on behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for your efforts to be here and to articulate your views.

I'm told that I have to say we are suspended. I'm assuming we do not leave virtually but we wait online while we reconfigure for the next set of witnesses.

With that, we are suspended. Thank you.

● (1215)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1220)

The Chair: We have our next set of witnesses. I note that the time is 12:20, so we'll go until 1:20 and put in the full hour.

We have with us Senator White. We have Mr. Wright and Mr. Benson Cowan.

Since there's no particular order, unless there's been some agreement that I don't know about, I'm going to go in the order you are listed on the witness list.

We have Senator White for seven minutes.

Hon. Vernon White (Senator, Ontario, CSG) : Thank you very much, and good afternoon.

I want to thank you for inviting me to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, which is studying systemic racism in policing in Canada.

If I may, I'll introduce myself, which will help members better focus their questions.

I spent almost 25 years in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police working in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon, Nova Scotia, and here in Ottawa at headquarters. Of my almost 25 years, I spent 19 years in the north, spread across the three territories and northen Labrador. I left the RCMP as an assistant—

An hon. member: I can't hear anything at all.

The Chair: We are having technical difficulties.

Please continue.

Hon. Vernon White: I left the RCMP as an assistant commissioner in 2005. Following my time as a member of the RCMP—

The Chair: Sorry, we seem to be having more technical difficulties.

If you wish to restart, you're welcome to do so.

Hon. Vernon White: Following my time as a member of the RCMP, I spent seven years as a police chief, two years in Durham Region and then five years here in Ottawa. From an education perspective, I have an undergraduate degree from Acadia University, a master's from Royal Roads and a doctorate from the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security at Charles Sturt University. All my education was completed while continuing to work full time in my policing roles.

Following my policing career, I was appointed to the Senate. I have continued to teach at various universities in Canada and internationally. As well, I do research, often into the issues that impact our criminal justice system and, of course, policing itself.

In relation to your work here, I wanted to speak to a few areas that I believe are important to this discussion. They include training and recruiting, education and of course the most recent argument for the defunding of the police. I will conclude my comments with my view on systemic racism in policing.

Although it is already dated, there is a 2014 Justice Goudge report, “Policing Canada in the 21st Century”, which I believe the committee may want to look at, as there are good avenues for discussion that you could consider.

On the recruitment and training perspective, I believe we need a national review in both of these areas. I would argue that policing today no longer follows standards that are set out nationally, but rather they are found within the mandate of the provinces and territories, and as a result are difficult to completely engage in.

We have, give or take, 180 police agencies in Canada with expenditures of around $15 billion. The disparity in training and recruiting is notable. I would argue that this is an area where the federal government could set a path forward in setting national policing standards for both officers and police agencies. I have met previously with first nations police chiefs, and they expressed a similar concern and stated that they would also support such a movement.

Other countries have been able to do this by setting up a college of policing model—not to be confused with the police college. As an example, the U.K. has done this. They established the College of Policing, which is a professional body for everyone who works in policing in England and Wales. The purpose of the college is "to provide those working in policing with the skills and knowledge necessary to prevent crime, protect the public, and secure public trust.”

Their functions include three primary areas: knowledge, such as developing research and infrastructure for improving evidence of what works; education supporting the development of individuals in policing, including setting educational requirements; and lastly, standards that draw on the best available evidence of what works to set standards in policing for forces and individuals.

I would make the argument that a similar model should be developed in Canada. You may see some jurisdictional arguments with maybe some jurisdictions arguing they'd like to opt out. I would suggest that it would be at their peril.

We can see across this country that without this model, we are scattered from both a recruiting standards and training standards perspective. In Ontario, it's 13 weeks to complete your basic training; in the RCMP it is six months, and some other jurisdictions are even longer. The stark reality is that the challenges police agencies face have changed dramatically, and I'm not sure that we've kept up.

Education of police officers is essential to the development of the officer and the organization overall. Research conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia speaks to the importance of not only continuous training of police officers but of continuous education as well.

I do not argue, as some may, that police officers must have a university degree to begin their career, but I am of the firm belief that education needs to be a foundation of their career and provided throughout their career. Some countries require that a police officer complete an undergraduate degree to be considered fully accredited. Some require education to be taken in its entirety prior to entering the police service, and others require that it continue throughout their career. Regardless, I believe that a focus on education will be important as we look to move forward.

The last area is defunding of police. This most recent argument is one that, in a different way, has been argued by police officers and police leaders for decades, except they have been arguing that the demands placed on them would often be better served by others.

In 2008, when the federal government advised they would provide funds for a 2,500-officer program, many—including myself and senior union leaders—argued that the funds would be better advised to be provided for mental health and addictions services. The continued growth of expectations placed on police has seen a concurrent growth in policing budgets at some level.

As an example, the deinstitutionalization of mental health facilities in the late 1980s and into the 1990s saw a growth in the involvement of police officers in mental health calls for service. The provinces believed that the process of moving patients or clients into communities was better for the lives of the individuals, and it was. However, there were also substantial savings that were often not reinvested in the community programming to provide support.

● (1225)

The impact is that all too often the police have become the de facto response unit to mental health calls for service, often without the resources needed to fully engage. Instead, they use the tools they have.

Some police agencies have identified that a full 20% of the calls for service are mental health calls, often not criminal in nature. Some would argue that more mental health workers, working hand in glove with the police responding to these calls, would be a better service. It's been done, and it is better. However, even this response is a downstream service.

The stark reality is that wait times to see much-needed mental health resources in the community are shockingly insufficient, and that investment in this upstream section of the health system is where it could make the greatest impact, and we would reduce the demand on police—most importantly, by having the right resource engaged at the right time for the right reason.

The same could be argued for the lack of drug addiction resources, where we have six- to eight-month wait-lists in many provinces for residential or even non-residential drug treatment. Many of the people on these wait-lists find themselves involved in the criminal justice system, many times while waiting for treatment.

Again, funding for residential and non-residential drug treatment would remove many of the addicted from the work of our law enforcement and criminal justice systems and place it where it should be, which is with health officials.

● (1230)

The Chair: Senator White, could you wind up? I apologize for the—

Hon. Vernon White: I will.

My last point is in relation specifically to systemic racism. I would argue that in all government organizations, there has been, and most often still is, systemic racism. This includes the police. An example I've used is representation. In fact, a report from a parliamentary committee called “Equality Now!”, worked on by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, identified that law enforcement must be a representative institution. Both identified this when the discussion of racial bias was at the forefront. As some would say, we need time.

The “Equality Now!” report and the consensus report from CACP were completed in 1983 and 1984. The question is this: How much time is needed?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our second seven-minute round is with Mr. Cowan.

Mr. Benson Cowan (Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Board of Nunavut): Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I'm the chief executive officer of the Legal Services Board of Nunavut, which is the territorial legal aid provider.

Nunavut's legal aid context is a little different. There are very few private lawyers in Nunavut. The Legal Services Board is by far the largest employer of lawyers in Nunavut, perhaps even in the Arctic. Certainly that's the case with respect to criminal law. Almost 100% of criminal cases pass through our staff lawyers and our contract lawyers at some point, and we probably carry more than 90% of them to conclusion.

I reside in Rankin Inlet, which is a community of about 2,500 people in the Kivalliq region in central Nunavut. I've been there since January 2019. I grew up in a series of remote first nations communities in northern Manitoba and northern Ontario. While I have a lot of experience working and living with indigenous communities, I want to be really clear that my perspective is not that of an indigenous person. I was listening in on the previous witnesses. With respect to Nunavut, President Obed and President Kotierk's evidence and perspective is, I'd submit, the lens through which these issues need to be dealt with. I can offer some technical advice, but I want to be really clear that I don't experience the systemic racism in the same way that the Inuit members of my community do.

When we talk about systemic racism, for me it's a fairly simple equation: Is there a racialized group that is experiencing a disproportionate burden or barrier? Is that ongoing and persistent? Are remedial efforts ineffective or nonexistent? I would submit that the evidence that this is the case with respect to policing in Nunavut is overwhelming.

We can start in terms of evidence. We can look at the data from StatsCan that suggest that Nunavummiut, people who reside in Nunavut outside of Iqaluit—in most communities, that's over 90%—are four times as likely to be charged with a criminal offence than other Canadians. Once charged, they're more likely to be prosecuted. Once prosecuted, they're more likely to be convicted. Once convicted, they're more likely to be sentenced to jail. They are sentenced to longer sentences, and they serve more of those sentences. I've summarized some of that data in the Legal Services Board 2018-19 annual report, if you're interested, and there are sources for it as well.

Also, when we look at the evidence of systemic racism with respect to policing in Nunavut, we can also look at the repeated instances that we hear throughout the justice system of interactions between the police and members of the community that are fraught with violence and that are otherwise problematic. I summarized almost 30 of those last June and forwarded them to the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP. I met with the commissioner and asked her to consider doing a systemic review. However, those instances that I reported on are still a fraction of what we hear in the community on a regular and ongoing basis. They're present in the courts. There's a consistent process of charges being withdrawn or judicial commentary on these instances. There is a wealth of evidence that there are, on the ground, problematic interactions of a nature that, frankly, just don't exist to the same extent in other jurisdictions in the country.

Then the other piece of evidence is sort of what's missing: any systematic, public or transparent approach to the conduct in criminal investigations and proceedings in relation to this conduct. There have been a few conduct investigations and one set of criminal charges that have been laid in Nunavut against police over the past 20 years.

● (1235)

Generally speaking, I estimate that partly because there is very little in the way of a systematic approach to conduct investigations on the part of the RCMP senior management and partly because it's not a transparent model, we just don't see evidence of these matters being addressed.

Very quickly, I'd say that obviously it's really clear that a new model is required for policing in Nunavut. Regardless of the content of that model, I'd say that there are three elements that must be addressed for any change to be possible.

One is increased resources to front-line policing. In this age of “defund the police”, I know that's not a very popular point of view, but the conditions that rank-and-file officers are forced to deal with are unbelievably arduous and stressful, and no change is possible without more resources. Also, frankly, you're never going to attract qualified Inuit applicants to go and work in those conditions either. Without increased funding for front-line policing, no change is possible.

Second, you need increased resources for restorative justice and social services in the communities. I cannot emphasize enough the lack of alternative dispute resolution or counselling or therapeutic services in Nunavut communities. There is basically a dearth of any of the range of services that are provided in other communities in this country. As a result, all these problems are handed to the police, and they respond with the tools they have, which more often than not are tools of coercion, arrest and charging.

The third thing that has to change is there needs to be meaningful, robust, independent civilian oversight. That means independent civilian investigations on criminal and use-of-force and death allegations, independent complaint-based conduct investigations, and independent oversight at the national level of RCMP policy and strategic direction. I think it's clear that the senior management of the RCMP are unable to drive change and respond to this. The current situation, in which they're not accountable to civilian oversight in a structured way, is part of the problem.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cowan.

With that, we're going to go to Mr. Wright as our final seven-minute witness, please.

Mr. Robert S. Wright (Social Worker and Sociologist, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

By way of introduction, let me just say that I'm Robert Wright. I'm a social worker and a sociologist whose 30-year career in the field has brought me into the fields of child welfare, correctional mental health, education and a range of other fields. I have worked extensively with victims and perpetrators of violence of all forms. I want to thank the committee for having me as a witness. I hope I can bring an informed perspective to the committee.

I hail from Nova Scotia, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq peoples. People of African descent were not so much settlers as they were settled on this territory, and we have been here for over 400 years and have still here in Nova Scotia some of the oldest and largest Black communities of Canada.

When it comes to thinking about systemic racism in policing, we have the distinction in Nova Scotia of having been the province of the inquiry into the wrongful conviction of Donald Marshall Junior. We're also the province of the Supreme Court decision in the case known as R.D.S., and as the pioneer of the impact of race in cultural assessments, I am proud that Nova Scotia is the first jurisdiction in Canada to use these specialized pre-sentence reports to support the courts' arriving at more informed sentences in an effort to address in part the dramatic overrepresentation of people of African descent under correctional supervision in Canada.

I was a participant in a dialogue between members of African-Canadian communities and the Canadian Human Rights Commission several years ago. The Office of the Correctional Investigator had representatives at that meeting, and it was their presence at those meetings that prompted the OCI to make a focal point of their 2013 report a focus on diversity in corrections and the experiences of Black inmates under correctional supervision.

I do not believe I need to tell the members of this committee or Canadians viewing this proceeding that racism exists in the criminal justice system and that policing, as the doorway into that system, is in a critical location to address issues of systemic racism, overrepresentation and differential treatment of people of African descent within those systems.

In response to your questions later, no doubt I will reference recommendations that have been articulated in other reports and studies, but I want to use my time now to emphasize two or three points that I think are critical as we consider how to address the systemic racism that exists in policing and in other layers of the criminal justice system.

The first point is that any reform, any study, any solution must be led by people of African descent. In response to the challenges that we have had here recently in Nova Scotia related to police street checks—and I won't speak in great detail about the machinations that accompanied focus on the dramatic overrepresentation of Black bodies in those statistics—I will say that members of the African-Nova Scotian communities here have called for a provincial African-Nova Scotian policing strategy. It is our belief that no internal studies, no provincially led studies that do not focus and prioritize the leadership and the engagement of people of African descent will be sufficient to address the problem.

● (1240)

The second thing that I would point out is that in the effort to solve the problems that exist in policing, to defund the police by shifting resources to community agencies, mental health services and the like that might be better able to serve our populations, we must remember that those organizations to which we would shift those funds themselves all have records of systemic racism against people of African descent, and it would likely occur that simply the location of our systemic oppression and exclusion would be shifted, rather than that the systemic racism problem would be solved.

Finally, I would simply say that in our effort to address systemic racism in policing, it will be important that all of those organizations that have oversight over policing, from the human rights commissions to police review boards to police commissions and the like, would bring systemic racism to an end in all of those locations. It will be essential in this work.

Thank you for the time, and I look forward to engaging in the questions.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright, Mr. Cowan and Senator White.

With that, we'll start our six-minute round with Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have six minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your testimony, Senator White, Mr. Wright and Mr. Cowan. Thank you also for joining us today.

My first questions are for Senator White.

Senator, as I read your curriculum vitae, I noticed that you have spent a lot of time in policing in various communities.

I'm going to start with a simple question. What is the difference between being a police officer in the north and being a police officer in a big city?

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: The expectations that are placed on you in northern communities are to be not just a police officer but also to be a member of the recreation committee and to coach different teams, because there's an expectation placed by the community that when you come into those communities. I'll look at Kimmirut as an example, where I coached soccer and volleyball, neither of which I played.

The expectations certainly in those communities are much different. There's also—I think for me, anyway, having served there as long as I did, for 19 years—that the value I felt by being able to help out in the community was so much more readily available, whereas in a large city there are often service calls, call after call. Often, during the first few years of policing, you're not very engaged in community activities because you're busy doing the response type of call.

The community expectations in Nunavut, as an example, where I served my last northern time, are much different. They expect much more than just a police officer. They expect many things from you, and if you're not willing to give that, then you probably will not be very successful as a police officer in some of those communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Senator.

During the first hour, I asked the representatives of the Inuit communities a question about the length of stay of police officers, who often begin their careers in the north. Unfortunately, there are no statistics on that.

Do you believe that, in two years, a police officer has enough time to become sufficiently involved in those communities to be able to connect with residents?

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: I think that question was for me. I didn't hear if you said it was, but if it was, certainly I do think two years is a short period of time. I think really good police officers will make themselves engaged quickly and ramp it up. The communities often identify that two years is not long enough. That is understandable, but, to be fair, I served four years in Whitehorse and three and a half in Yellowknife, but the other communities I served in were typically two-year periods.

It was often certainly my loss to be leaving as quickly as I did, but the organization, particularly in Nunavut, and probably more so than in the NWT and in the Yukon, tries to move people as often as they can, not always for the betterment of the community, and certainly communities would be better served with officers serving longer periods of time. However, it's a real challenge to find officers to take postings in Nunavut today. You may not have an increased number of officers wanting to stay longer than two years in the community.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Senator White, according to a brief by Professor Leuprecht of the Royal Military College of Canada, “In Nunavut, the RCMP is so short-staffed that members from other divisions regularly do 6-week stints in the territory to fill vacancies.”

What do you think the RCMP Commissioner should do in the coming months to address this problem, which seems very urgent to me?

● (1250)

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: It's not a new problem, though. When I was there in 2001 when I first returned to Nunavut, we were bringing in officers from the south. When I was the police chief in Ottawa, I was seconding police officers to Nunavut to do short stints to help out as well.

I would argue that the solution to increased time in communities in the north, as well as having the number of officers at a sustainable level, is going to be developing a recruiting strategy in Nunavut for Nunavut.

We ran an Inuit recruiting pilot project in 2001-2003. We hired over a dozen Inuit police officers, of which two or three are currently posted on Parliament Hill. There are lots of challenges with that, because you have a number of barriers to hiring that you have to work on, and none of them are inexpensive.

I truly believe the solution or partial solution for Nunavut is going to be a recruiting strategy that looks at today, tomorrow and in 10 years' time the number of Inuit you can bring in to the organization. Whether that continues to be the RCMP or even if they went to a self-policing model in the future, you're still going to have the same challenge. I still think that recruiting Inuit is going to be part of that solution.

The Chair: You have a little less than 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Given the interpretation, it will be even less than that because I have to ask a question in French.

Mr. White, if I understand correctly, these stays should certainly be longer in order to build a stronger connection with the community.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: I would agree that longer would be better, but it's more difficult to supply the resources if you extend the number of years. You are not going to have as many officers willing to take those postings to the north.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Berthold, you've asked that question twice now, and I think it's very important. I'm going to suggest to the analysts that they make contact with you or your office and refine that question, and maybe research could be provided to the committee, because you're asking an important question.

With that, Mr. Sikand, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome our panellists.

Mr. Cowan and Mr. Wright, Statistics Canada recently announced it will begin to collect data on the race of victims of crime and people accused of crime. However, it appears it will not include data related to the use of force in the incident or on mental health checks unless they involve a criminal offence. What do you think of this development?

I'll begin with Mr. Cowan, please.

Mr. Benson Cowan: In a Nunavut context, the collection of that data is less relevant, because the vast majority of people are Inuit. As for the rest of the country, it's not within my brief to comment more generally. In a Nunavut context, we can assume almost exactly that the people interacting with the police or mental health, especially out of Iqaluit—

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Do you have any suggestions as to how that data should be collected or used?

Mr. Benson Cowan: Again, in the Nunavut context, I think the data tells a very compelling story of what's going on. It's great to collect data and it's important to collect the right data, but where we have it, where the evidence is really clear, there's still a big gap in how it informs policy and operational choices on the part of institutions in the justice system.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you.

I'll ask the same questions to Mr. Wright.

Mr. Robert S. Wright: My view is that collecting race-based data is always a positive thing. It's really critical that we begin, as a country, to better understand the real experience of an increasing diversity of Canadians.

In terms of the use of the data, however, that is where I would have a concern in that, if certain data is not reviewed from a critical race perspective by individuals who are informed about the nature of systemic racism, sometimes the data can actually support what I will call "racist claims". If we take a look at data and we see that in a particular area Black people are committing more crime than white people, if we don't understand that Black people in that area are dramatically overrepresented among the poor, among those who don't experience positive engagement in education, among those who are systemically excluded from employment, for example, then the data isn't really going to help us.

What's really critical as we begin collecting this data is that we have specialized individuals within Statistics Canada who can apply critical race analysis to the data, so that we are not allowing the data to reinforce racist stereotypes.

● (1255)

Mr. Gagan Sikand: You actually bring up a great point, and I'd like to follow up with you with another question.

You have a lot of experience doing your social work, and from the part of the country you're from, I know Halifax has a report on street checks employed by the RCMP. They condemned the practice as targeting young Black men and creating a disproportionate and negative impact on the Black community, leading to calls for a public apology. The CRCC has undertaken a review of the RCMP's policies and procedures regarding these street checks, but their report has not yet been released.

Are there any law or policy reforms that you think would be helpful at the national level?

Mr. Robert S. Wright: Yes. We have been concerned about the street check issue since 2003, with the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission's report that acknowledged that police had been street checking a prominent Black individual here in our community. The human rights commission said street checks need to be looked at.

Since 2003, police and RCMP were keeping race-based data and did nothing with that data for 14 years. We had the Wortley report. We had a legal opinion on the legality of street checks, and not three hours after the legal opinion declared that street checks were illegal, we had a provincial ministerial directive that suggested how similar checks could be done under some kind of looking into suspicious activity.

We believe the provincial ministerial directive is still directing police to engage in illegal activity in the way they police citizens, and of course, we believe Black folks will be dramatically overrepresented in those stats. Therefore, I think some federal directive simply suggesting that these practices cannot break the law is necessary.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sikand. We're going to have to leave it there.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Really quickly, do you think this warrants a public apology, yes or no, sir?

Mr. Robert S. Wright: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Sikand, it was very quick of you to sneak that question in there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with Mr. White.

You have a great deal of experience as a member of the RCMP and as chief of police thereafter. You talked about three main areas: training, recruitment, and funding.

Your experience may go back a few years, but was there specific training on culture and the different communities when officers joined a police service?

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: Thank you very much for the question.

My police training was with the RCMP, and we were training police officers to go everywhere and anywhere in Canada. You found out where you were going close to the end of your career. The training was not specific to the location you were about to go to. Instead, it was generally identified nationally as a first nation, Inuit or Métis community, for example. I think we have seen a shift.

Certainly, when I was in the Yukon, when officers came we would oblige them to be educated in the first nation communities in the Yukon. In fact, when they would arrive in a community, they were actually mentored by a local elder in those communities. I think that paid dividends. The Council of Yukon First Nations was very involved in the development. I think it paid dividends in terms of the relationship building and in terms of the knowledge and understanding of non-indigenous officers, or even indigenous officers from other parts of Canada, who had come to the Yukon.

I think that type of model works well. Because the RCMP training facility is so large and has so many people go through, it's more difficult to give them the level of training they would need on every potential location they would go to.

I have to say, though, I am concerned about the fact that our training is still at six months and, like I said, in the province of Ontario it's 13 weeks. I think a review needs to be done as to whether or not the same amount of time that was needed at that time is needed 30 years after I went through the RCMP training academy. I think that would be an important step forward as well.

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

You also talked about funding. You said that funding should be allocated elsewhere, for example, to mental health organizations. Would it be for the communities or for the officers as well? How do you see that?

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

Are other people getting translation? No.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I'm on the French channel.

When Mr. White was speaking earlier, there was no interpretation either.

Is it working now?

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: I'm getting it now.

The Chair: Could you start the question again, Madame Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: In terms of the funding, you said that funds should be allocated elsewhere, for example, to mental health organizations. How do you see that? Would it be for the officers themselves or for the people in the communities?

[*English*]

The Chair: Was that directed to Senator White?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Yes.

[*English*]

Hon. Vernon White: When I was a police chief in Ottawa, we had a mobile mental health crisis unit, which meant that we had mental health workers working hand in glove with police officers supporting [*Technical difficulty—Editors*]. The concern is that it's still a downstream service and I would argue that we would be much better off with a large infusion of funding into both mental illness and drug addiction to try to head off that problem, rather than still having police officers show up at the door.

My concern now is.... The Province of Nova Scotia is an example. In some locations, it's over a year wait-list to see a psychiatrist today. I think we need to actually have an infusion of funds into both mental illness treatment that allows people to see them before it becomes a police phone call. The same would go for drug addiction where the average street addict is committing multiple crimes every day just to try to satisfy their addiction. Many of them are still waiting for months and months or longer to get into residential drug treatment. My suggestion would be the money actually be spent upstream, not downstream.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. White.

Mr. Cowan, you also touched on the issue of funding, which is a divisive issue. Some people talk about defunding, while others talk about having more resources. How do you see that on your side?

Mr. Benson Cowan: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I think that, again, in the Nunavut context, the question of defunding is entirely.... It's a red herring. Most communities have a handful of officers who are subject to arduous conditions, and it's impossible to imagine any positive change taking place unless you had more resources and more stability in community detachments.

I do think, alongside that, you need a massive investment in community resources as well. Certainly, in remote northern communities, policing is so important in a way that it has a different character and flavour than it does in the south. If it's not properly funded, it destroys public trust in a whole range of justice institutions. It makes the communities less safe. It makes vulnerable people less likely to go to the police for help.

● (1305)

The Chair: You have roughly 20 seconds left, so I think we'll move on to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for your presentations.

Let me start with you, Mr. Wright. You didn't want to go into the machinations of carding in Nova Scotia, but you sort of touched on it. A CBC report today says that carding was made illegal and banned in Halifax—or street checks were, rather—in 2019. You say that the provincial government seems to have tried a way around that. That presumably hasn't been successful, but clearly the evidence before the commission was that there was actually a disproportionate targeting of Black Nova Scotians in that situation.

Do you think, as I think you did say, a national ban of some sort might be effective in overriding that? Do you think that's something we should look further into?

Mr. Robert S. Wright: I think there is space for a national directive to the provinces that oversee policing to ensure that those jurisdictions that oversee policing are ensuring that police are not breaking the law as a regular part of their standard operating procedures. Street checks were declared, through a legal opinion, to be an illegal practice. We believe the current ministerial directive that governs how police should be stopping people is also directing them to do something that is illegal. Rather than the province seeking some kind of judicial or legislative authority to do that work, they simply are doing this thing. All of the local systems to oversee police seem to have been powerless or feckless in their responses to our concerns.

There does seem to be some space for some federal intervention.

Mr. Jack Harris: I wonder out loud, at this point, whether or not the contract policing arrangements with the RCMP and the provinces might be able to deal with such an issue. But that's something we can look into a little later.

I have a question for you, Mr. Cowan. Thank you for your presentation. There's a lot of talk, of course, about increasing the number of Inuit in the police force. I read a report last fall, and we heard nice words from Commissioner Lucki as well, about some training programs, but the fact of the matter seems to be that there hasn't been a single Inuit person recruited in Nunavut in the last 15 years.

Is this a realistic idea, or is this just another current response to something that's been going on for decades and hasn't been fixed?

Mr. Benson Cowan: Thank you. It's a really interesting question.

Look, I struggle to recruit Inuit lawyers—it's a big focus of what I try to do—to come and work for my organization. The first principle, in my experience, is that Inuit and, more broadly speaking, indigenous people know which organizations are safe for them and know which organizations are invested in their success. That is a fundamental conversation I have, when I am recruiting, with Inuit applicants and indigenous applicants generally. It is front and centre in my strategy and in their questions and in the conversation about how we're going to advance their careers. I think the lack of success in recruiting Inuit into the RCMP likely reflects, to a large part, their assessment of whether that organization is safe for them and whether it is invested truly in their success.

● (1310)

Mr. Jack Harris: One Inuit lawyer from Nunavut was on CBC recently. The way she described the relationship between the Inuit and the RCMP was that people feared them and didn't trust them. Maybe that has something to do with the failure to be willing to play a role in that. Is that something you could agree with?

Mr. Benson Cowan: Yes.

I'd also say again, an organization that does not.... The control that the RCMP senior management have over conduct investigations is virtually absolute. The fact that they've struggled at the top level to even acknowledge systemic racism suggests that they would struggle to identify code of conduct violations and prosecute them, and not even for the sake of punishment but even just for the sake of remedial measures.

Let me put it this way. I can imagine that it would be very difficult for an indigenous person, especially an Inuit person, to go into an organization that does not have a record of taking these issues seriously internally.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there, Mr. Harris.

With that, we have Mr. Morrison, for three minutes.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to thank the witnesses today. It's really important for us to have experts like you to guide us and help us with your expertise in building some recommendations so that we can improve law enforcement and policing in Canada.

My first question is for Senator White.

I brought this up with the commissioner a little while ago, about the hiring and maybe divesting of hiring to provinces and territories for RCMP, rather than basically a centralized hiring process for all of Canada.

I wonder if in your time up north you maybe thought, wouldn't it be better if the provinces and territories were the ones that were actually doing the hiring? I know they have staffing officers in every province, but wouldn't that be better?

Hon. Vernon White: Certainly in 2001 when we ran our Inuit recruiting pilot project, that's exactly the way we did that. We identified the barriers to hiring for Inuit into the RCMP. We developed solutions past those barriers, which did not include a reduction in qualifications. It was raising people to the bar, like most of us have been mentored in our lives. That's the model we looked at.

The challenge you will face if you hire specifically to Nunavut is that many of those officers, like most people who join the RCMP, want the opportunity to move somewhere else in the country if they choose to. You have to ensure that you at least have a set of standards that are met.

Now, for those standards, say, as an example, a vision standard, Inuit have a higher than average level of myopia. That required, in our case, for half of our applicants to have laser eye surgery. Certainly we would not have been able to do that in the south. In fact, the RCMP at the time weren't extremely happy with me doing it in the north.

I think you have to look at those standards and decide which of those are barriers that can be overcome rather than barriers that stop the recruiting.

Mr. Rob Morrison: I also have a question for Mr. Wright, and for Mr. Cowan if we have time.

Mr. Wright, I noticed when I read your resumé that you talked about crime prevention versus crime reduction. You were talking about diverting youth away from criminal activity and steering them down the right side of the street versus their getting into crime and then it's very difficult. You mentioned that in your opening statement.

I wonder if you could each briefly comment. There's not much time left.

The Chair: Mr. Morrison has left you 15 seconds each.

Mr. Robert S. Wright: I will say simply that we all know preventing crime is a lot easier than addressing it post-fact and that helping people to keep from developing a life of crime is easier than rehabilitating a criminal.

Mr. Benson Cowan: Very briefly, the available resources for diversion in Nunavut are shocking and embarrassingly low compared with any other jurisdiction in the country. There are simply no practical options and there's a great deal of reluctance. I started criminal practice 20 years ago when diversion was not always available and was often looked at suspiciously, and I would say that is still the approach in Nunavut.

● (1315)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Fergus, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin peoples.

I want to congratulate all the witnesses for their testimony today.

I only have three minutes, so I will be very brief.

[*English*]

I will not have an opportunity to ask everyone a question, but Mr. Wright, Mr. Cowan and Senator White, thank you very much for your testimony.

Mr. Wright, you had mentioned the importance of having a critical race perspective. You gave us an example that when people are being arrested, you will see that Blacks.... If you don't use a critical race perspective, you'll come to the wrong conclusions.

I also appreciate what Mr. Cowan said, in terms of Inuit and further-afield indigenous people, that they won't feel that our federal policing service is a safe place for them to make a career.

Mr. Wright, do you find that African Nova Scotians consider the RCMP or local police services to be safe places?

Mr. Robert S. Wright: I would have to say no. For the sake of brevity, I would just say that if we look at the number of human rights complaints that are being made by people who serve who come from African backgrounds, we would see that in the evidence. There are human resources and human rights complaints that are levied.

When you think about the north—even more powerfully if you think about it—we're asking people who come from ethnic settler backgrounds to train in a colonial model of policing and to deliver that service to an indigenous community. To ask indigenous people to train in a colonial form of policing to police their own communities is really to ask them to adopt an internal identity struggle before they even have their first day on the job.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Then how do we crack this nut? How do we have an opportunity to try to...? What would you recommend as measures that we should take to try to increase the importance, so that our police forces reflect the diversity of our communities, and especially those communities that seem to be the most targeted by our police forces?

Mr. Robert S. Wright: I think that, particularly in indigenous communities, probably what we need are indigenous people creating indigenous forms of public safety in policing and perhaps even looking at indigenous forms of understanding the law and public safety.

Similarly, in Black communities, I've said that we need an African Nova Scotian policing strategy here, something that is designed and run by Black folks.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Wright.

There is a principle in our committees that we can't report unless we hear something from our witnesses or read something from our witnesses, so if there's anything that you feel should be added, I encourage all of our witnesses, please, to submit it to the clerk.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Vidal, you have three minutes, please.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses again, as many of the members have indicated.

My first question is for Senator White.

Senator White, I just want to draw on your vast experience a little bit. There was recently an article in the Canadian Press detailing the work of the Nishnawbe Aski Police Service and the success that it has had in doing culturally responsive training. The article discusses the impact that the relationship between the police service and the community has on the level of trust. That portrayal contrasts with the barriers that we see. I've seen this in northern Saskatchewan, where the RCMP send new recruits to places where they face significant language and cultural barriers.

You spoke about the two-year aspect of going to these northern communities, but we also have this policy, it seems, in which we send new, young members to these communities to gain experience, so to speak. I'm curious about your opinion on what this policy says to these inexperienced members, these young recruits, and what role that plays in the lack of opportunity to build a good relationship in the communities, as you talked about early on in your presentation.

● (1320)

Hon. Vernon White: Thank you very much for the question, sir.

Certainly 15 or 20 years ago, the RCMP would not have allowed—or seldom would have allowed—you to transfer to the isolated northern communities in the three northern territories. At that time we had hundreds, if not more, applicants looking for transfers north who already had a substantial amount of experience. That's not true today and the challenge that I think they're facing in the RCMP is that they are probably thousands of officers short already. They do not have enough officers to even fill the positions they have across the country. On top of that, they have a much lower number of officers applying to go into the isolated posts in the northern territories, for example.

As a result, they're having to send people with less experience than they would have in the past. That is a problem. I don't know if it's one that's solved easily, beyond getting the RCMP numbers up to the level they should be and then trying to see whether or not they could recruit from those first nation, Inuit and Métis communities to go back into those communities—and I would argue the same for northern Saskatchewan. Many Inuit would not necessarily want to work in the community they grew up in, for example, so I'm not suggesting that, but nothing stops them from working in another community in a different part of Baffin Island.

I'm always back to the same thing: If we cannot represent those we serve, we're not representing those we serve. As I would argue in the past, we want to be recruiting with a window, not a mirror. If we can't get to that point, we're probably not going to be successful in in cracking this nut, as I think Mr. Fergus said.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vidal.

Madame Damoff, you have three minutes, please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I believe I'll be taking over Ms. Damoff's spot, if that's okay.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you. I want to thank the witnesses as well.

Mr. Cowan, I want to talk to you about the issue of accountability and civilian oversight. I know you had mentioned the challenges you've had and the fact that you've made some complaints through the system.

What has your experience been in representing clients, the outcomes, the timelines, the transparency and the actual accountability measures that have come out of these complaints?

Mr. Benson Cowan: With respect to the CRCC in particular, or just generally with respect to the RCMP?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: If you can speak to both, I think it will be helpful.

Mr. Benson Cowan: Our experience with the CRCC is that.... I've no doubt that it is a well-meaning organization, but it has a limited mandate and it has a critical funding problem. I'd also say that, as far as I am aware, there are no indigenous or northern commissioners on the commission. I would suggest that is an immediate and quick fix that could be made.

Ultimately, it's an organization with a very limited mandate. I feel somewhat uncomfortable picking on it because it can only do what it can do.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Cowan, because I have limited time, is there a model that you think can work for the RCMP? Is there a model that you would think can be modified to help the RCMP with this?

Mr. Benson Cowan: I think if you look at just about every province—and indeed on the CRCC's website they show the different oversight models for different provinces—you need a combination of civilian investigation of criminal matters and complaint-based independent investigation of conduct matters.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: How about systemic issues? I know that individual complaints will lead to individual results. How do we address systemic issues?

Mr. Benson Cowan: With systemic issues, what you want is a mandate to do systemic reviews on the part of usually the same organization that does the conduct investigations. Again, I would also look at the use of a civilian board providing direct oversight over the RCMP to hold them accountable on their policy and strategy decisions.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Mr. Wright, can you weigh in on this as well, please?

The Chair: Respond very briefly, please.

Mr. Robert S. Wright: I would say that such groups often will have equity and diversity kinds of profiles or subcommittees. I find those kinds of generic equity committees to be very unsatisfactory. Perhaps what is necessary is very culturally or community-specific committees to help inform those bodies.

● (1325)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anandasangaree.

Madame Michaud, you have a minute and a half, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wright, given your experience in social work on the ground, can you explain to us the effects of systemic racism in policing on racialized people, on indigenous people, and particularly on youth?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert S. Wright: I think we are seeing the impact, the overrepresentation of racialized people having contact with the police. I think it was Mr. Cowan who just said the litany: We're overpoliced, overcharged, overprosecuted, disproportionately found guilty, have higher sentences, have differential and negative experiences while under correctional supervision, serve our sentences longer, and have a harder time transitioning into the community and receiving education and employment thereafter.

I think that's the effect systemic racism tends to have on racialized people in Canada as it comes to policing and contact with the criminal justice system.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Michaud.

Mr. Harris, you have a minute and a half.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Cowan related to the CRCC. I understand your organization has put before the CRCC two letters of complaint in recent times related to the conduct of RCMP in handling prisoners, particularly women prisoners. Could you outline those complaints to the committee and reflect on whether or not this has any bearing on our study of systemic racism as it relates to policing in Nunavut?

Mr. Benson Cowan: I don't think we have the time for me to recount it in any detail, but I will make sure that the committee has a copy of my two letters that outline various issues with respect to it.

With respect to the issue of the strip-searching that took place in December, there were a handful of cases that I raised with the commission. I also raised them directly with the senior officer of the RCMP in Iqaluit to try in good faith to say, “This is happening. What is your organization going to do about it?”

I was very disappointed in her approach, which was to say until we have individual complainants come forward we can't do anything. It's not true and it shows, I think, the fundamental lack of engagement and commitment to change and accountability on the part of the senior management.

I will send the correspondence I provided so that the committee has the benefit of that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Unfortunately, that brings this panel to a close. On behalf of the committee, I'll say these are very thoughtful comments on all your parts and will be very informative to our study going forward.

Colleagues, at this point we adjourn. You will have to sign in again. You'll be sent a new password. At this point, I am still anticipating that we reconvene at two o'clock. I want to apologize to the staff who will be running around here and elsewhere doing what the protocols require. We have run about a half-hour over our allotted time.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.