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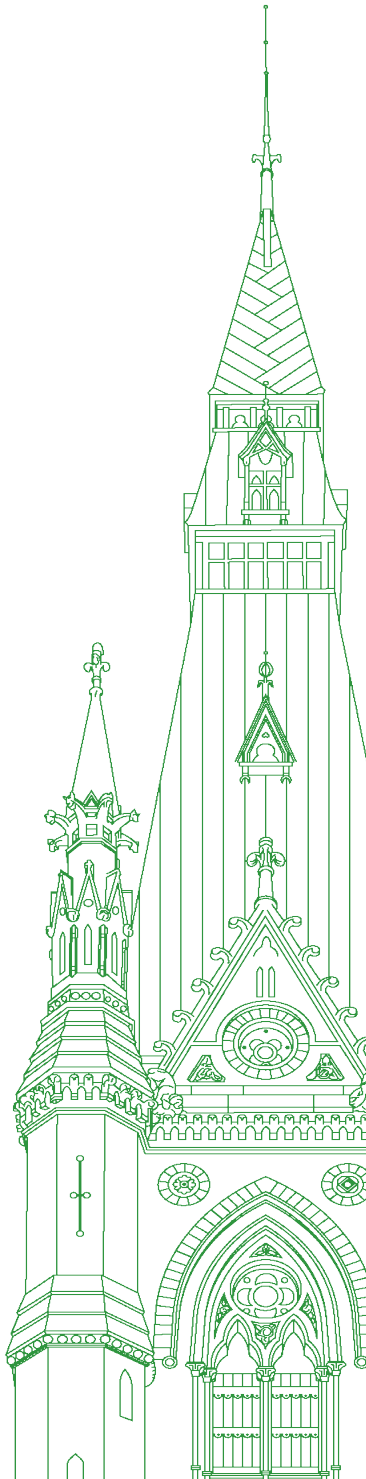

Chair: The Honourable John McKay

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Monday, December 7, 2020

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I see quorum. This is meeting number 11 of the Public Safety and National Security Committee.

As witnesses, we have with us as today, Alain Babineau, a retired RCMP officer and social justice advocate.

[*Translation*]

We also welcome Mr. Patrick Roy and Mr. Éric Roger from the Sherbrooke Police Department.

[*English*]

I'm going to ask Mr. Babineau to start for seven minutes, followed by the officers from Sherbrooke.

It works a bit easier if at around the five-minute mark, you look up at me. I will give you an indication of the time. I don't wish to cut you off, but it will give you an opportunity to complete your remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Babineau, you have the floor for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Alain Babineau (Consultant, Law Enforcement and Social Justice Advocate, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to appear today. My name is Alain Babineau. I'm a law enforcement and social justice advocate. I also have over 30 years' experience with law enforcement, 28 of which were with the RCMP.

[*Translation*]

I'm here this afternoon to talk to you about systemic racism and discrimination in policing and what I think needs to be done to purge the profession of these.

[*English*]

Systemic racism far too often rears its ugly head in policing in two different ways. First, in the way in which we deliver police services to BIPOC communities, and second, in the way police services often treat their own few racialized officers.

First of all, I believe that law enforcement protects the foundation of our society and that every action it poses touches a life in a significant way, positively or negatively. As trust in police also defines the extent to which members of the public view the police as legitimate, if police lose public confidence, it can compromise their ability and authority to work effectively.

Secondly, I believe that whether the public's decreased confidence in policing is caused by the behaviour of so-called individual bad apples or organizational recklessness and apathy in dealing with those bad apples, these issues negatively affect trust in the police, particularly among the most vulnerable communities.

In spite of the 1999 R. v. Brown decision by the Ontario Superior Court, which identified the racial profiling concept of “driving while Black”, and the 2019 judicial recognition by the Supreme Court of the notion of systemic racial profiling in the R. v. Le decision, the issue of racial profiling by law enforcement remains arguably one of the most highly contested topics of conversation in criminal justice today.

Internal systemic discrimination has been part of policing organizations for decades, and cannot be addressed unless identified clearly. Senator Murray Sinclair said:

> Some people believe that systemic racism is when everybody in the system is a racist and there is no system where everybody is a racist.

He clarified, though:

> Systemic racism is when the system itself is based upon and founded upon racist beliefs and philosophies and thinking and has put in place policies and practices that literally force even the non-racists to act in a racist way.

In 2019, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians annual report revealed that resistance to diversity and inclusion is strongest among the non-commissioned officer rank from which the future officers are drawn.

As commissioned officers are decision-makers and leaders in policing, this information is very concerning to me. During my 30 years in law enforcement, and since George Floyd's death, I've spoken to enough BIPOC officers to know that what I personally experienced and witnessed during my service is reflective of the experience of many with systemic discrimination within their respective organizations.

We must keep in mind that in policing, possibly more than any other field, the possession of social capital is essential. In this culture, trust, norms and networks approved by the dominant group, and those who hold the key to success determine who achieve advancement through the organization. Consequently, because of the lack of critical numbers, BIPOC members struggle with acquiring social capital.

[*Translation*]

To be fair, I must say that over the years, in an attempt to respond to the realities of diversity, police services have adopted policies, initiatives and practices to reflect community representation. However, in my opinion and that of many visible minority police officers, it is easy to see the gap between the adoption of diversity policies and their actual implementation within organizations.

[*English*]

While some individual human rights complaints contained descriptions of behaviour that reflect a racist workplace culture, during an investigation the dots are not usually connected, and an underlying pattern of systemic discrimination is not identified.

From my experience with the Quebec Human Rights Commission, the police ethics commissioner, as well as the Canadian Human Rights Commission, those agencies are far too often either unable or unwilling to investigate complaints of race or systemic discrimination in a meaningful way. As a result, those agencies perpetuate the problem of systemic racism in policing.

With respect to police unions, historically BIPOC officers have not felt heard by them. For example, RCMP's fledging National Police Federation, which does not have a single BIPOC member on its board, essentially attacked the commissioner last summer when she finally recognized the existence of systemic racism in the RCMP.

However the NPF is not alone. Right across Canada police unions have rapidly been rejecting the existence of any form of systemic discrimination within their particular service. As a result, various iterations of backlash have been filed by BIPOC officers right across the nation.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

As I mentioned throughout my remarks, systemic discrimination on the ground and inequalities within the police are deeply linked to a history of exclusion and prejudice. From an anti-discrimination perspective, there is an urgent need to examine the policies, practices and behaviours that encourage, condone and tolerate discrimination in any police organization.

[*English*]

Based on a previous lack of meaningful effort in the area of employment equity and policing, the federal government now has an opportunity to direct meaningful cultural changes in the RCMP so that it becomes an example for all other police services in this country to follow.

With respect to racial profiling, I believe that the federal government must also take the lead and pass an anti-racial profiling law. A proposed bill was tabled by the NDP in 2005, but it died in the end because of the federal election.

Ladies and gentlemen, with respect to eradication of systemic racism in policing, I say to you, “If not now, then when”.

The Chair: With that I'll call on the Sherbrooke police service to present in whatever order it wishes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy (Inspector, Regional Surveillance Division, Service de police de la Ville de Sherbrooke): I am Inspector Patrick Roy, manager of the Équipe mobile d'intervention psychosociale, the mobile psychosocial intervention team, or ÉMIP. I am accompanied by Sergeant Éric Roger, field supervising sergeant on the same team.

The work of our intervention team in the field is more related to mental health than to systemic racism. Of course, there may be some overlap on the street when police are involved, but our presentation is, in essence, about mental health.

Our organization has some 300 employees for a population of 170,000 people. We are located one hour and 15 minutes from Montreal. In 2015, like all police organizations in Quebec and across Canada, I imagine, we had to deal with an emerging mental health-related phenomenon in the field. Police officers had to face this, even though they were neither mental health experts nor social workers.

At the same time, the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de l'Estrie also noticed the emergence of a problematic situation on the streets. In 2015, we therefore decided to unite the forces of the police service and the hospital in order to create a joint unit in each patrol vehicle, that is to say a police patrol officer and a social worker.

We were inspired by the model that already existed at the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal at the time, namely the Équipe de soutien aux urgences psychosociales, ÉSUP, the psychosocial emergency support team. In 2015, our project got under way. You should know that in 2015, our patrollers were each spending seven hours a day on the streets to deal with mental health management. At that time, this tool became a must.

In 2016, the mobile outreach team was made up of a joint social worker and police patrol officer, operating two nights a week. As this initiative proved successful, in 2017 the presence of the mixed team was increased to three nights a week, and in 2018, to four nights a week. In 2018, our organization realized that our police officers were shifting from 7 to 14 work hours per day spent on mental health management, despite the team in the field.

In 2018, we were answering approximately 1,400 mental health-related calls per year; our mixed team on four nights a week answered 263 of those calls. That's when we decided, once again, to make a major organizational shift and appoint five police officers, five full-time resources, to manage mental health, seven days a week, seven nights a week. The social workers are still with us four nights a week. The rest of the time and slots are filled by police officers who have become mental health specialists rather than generalists.

The mission of the joint team and our police officers is simple: to promote multidisciplinary collaboration and support police work when dealing with people in crisis or whose mental state is disrupted, in order to facilitate their access to adapted services, whether in the areas of justice, health or community support.

Once our five resources were appointed, we established their roles and responsibilities. They are not social workers, and the leadership for health is not with the police service; it is with health. Whether we are talking about a police officer, a social worker, a doctor, or you in your families, we have to recognize that the number of people with mental health problems is increasing and we need to treat them. These people are not suspects to the police community; they are individuals. They become people, men and women, whom we need to guide rather than send to the judicial system. Prosecution is not necessarily the best tool.

Therefore, the role of these police officers, these five permanent police officers, is to support the generalist patrol officers in the application of laws and regulations related to persons whose mental state is disturbed; to take ownership and manage specific recurring cases; to analyze, plan and coordinate all requests for intervention related to treatment orders from the Commission d'examen des troubles mentaux or from various courts in Quebec, in order to proceed with the enforcement of orders, in collaboration with social workers.

● (1540)

Their role is also to support the management of runaways and missing persons with mental health problems; to support general police divisions in the field and the investigation of people who are homeless and suffering from mental health problems; to help police officers obtain requests for orders to bring people for care; to assist health services with complex cases within the territory of the City of Sherbrooke; to represent our organization by sitting on committees; and to publish follow-up reports tracking mental health.

The most important aspect of our organization is that these five officers participate in the development of our generalist police officers through coaching, mentoring, training and awareness.

I will now describe how an intervention proceeds from the moment we receive a call. We receive a call at the 911 emergency centre, and there is a confirmation that it is related to mental health. Our specialist police officers, accompanied by the social worker or not, travel with our generalist police officers to the indicated location. Once the situation is secured, the generalist police officers leave the premises and the specialist police officers take care of the follow-up and supervision of the individuals. Very often, the latter are not suspects.

In addition, these police specialists are trained in de-escalation and are familiar with communication strategies. They are trained in all types of mental health problems so that they can recognize them and then intervene. They also receive training on drugs and psychotic effects. They receive training from the range of health care providers and others, including mental health first aid, to help them target the type of intervention.

Finally, they take part in several committees, including a provincial mental health committee, a mental health-related committee and the regional strategic committee on homelessness. They are part of all focus groups.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roy.

Have you finished?

Mr. Patrick Roy: I think my seven minutes are up.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're already over seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: Fine.

If there are any questions, we can talk about the expected results and findings from the field.

The Chair: Excellent.

[*English*]

We're now on to the six-minute round of questions, starting with Mr. Motz, followed by Madame Lambropoulos, Madame Michaud and Mr. Harris.

Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you very much to our witnesses: Mr. Babineau, Inspector Roy and Sergeant Roger.

I can't help but say, Inspector, that you must get a lot of fun playing with that name of yours. You must get a lot of mileage out of that, given that you were a goaltender with the Canadiens for years. Good for you.

I want to ask both groups a couple of questions. I will start with you, Mr. Babineau.

First of all, to all three of you, thank you for your service to the communities, and for your [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

● (1545)

The Chair: His feed just froze there for a second.

This looks like a day for technical difficulties. In fact, I had a meeting earlier this morning that had to be cancelled because of technical difficulties.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Chair, we can't hear you.

The Chair: That's a bonus.

Glen, you're on mute.

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm sorry. I don't know what happened; everything just went blank on me.

The Chair: Okay, you can wind back to where you were complimenting the inspector for his goaltending skills.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Babineau, I want to ask you directly about the RCMP complaints process. As I was saying, we know it's backlogged and complex, but that's the public complaints process. I want to focus more on the internal process. We had a witness at our committee last week who spoke of some of the issues going on inside the complaints process. Obviously we need a fix. We need to fix the public complaints process, and I want to get your thoughts on this. First of all, the public safety minister has amalgamated CBSA and the RCMP into one public complaints commission, if you will. I want to get your thoughts on how you think that will play out.

Is there a way we can fix the internal process for the RCMP?

Mr. Alain Babineau: It's a big question.

First of all, there are two different processes for dealing with systemic discrimination and systemic racism. A person can go through two different processes. Number one is harassment, and the other one is if there's an issue with promotion or other things, which can addressed by way of grievances.

Historically, the RCMP processes, regardless of the type of complaint, have been wholly inefficient in dealing with racism period, much less systemic racism. I still think there's a lack of understanding, a lack of acknowledgement and, quite frankly, a lack of training to be able to investigate systemic discrimination complaints.

Mr. Glen Motz: With that being said, sir, what do you propose? If we're going to need a new oversight model—

Mr. Alain Babineau: Clearly. Absolutely.

Mr. Glen Motz: If that's the case, what do you suggest that model should look like?

Mr. Alain Babineau: First of all, the model should be totally independent from the RCMP. It should be completely separate. It should be diverse in composition and should be well trained in what systemic racism is all about. Until that happens, I'm afraid those complaints will be woefully handled.

Mr. Glen Motz: With that in mind, does a best practice model currently exist in this country that the RCMP could model itself after?

Mr. Alain Babineau: Quite frankly, I'm not aware of any. The Ontario Human Rights Commission might be the closest thing to a model, as they are able to investigate systemic racism within police agencies. They did that in North Bay, I think, with the North Bay Police Department a few years ago. They identified a systemic pattern of racism within that police department, but I think that would be the closest thing to a model that we can hope the RCMP could aim to become.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you for those comments.

Inspector Roy, I've got a couple questions for you. For this mobile psychosocial intervention team that you described so well for us, did your service receive any additional funding from government, either provincial or federal, for that program?

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: Can you hear me?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: There are no subsidies at all. We fund the program from our budgets. The police officers are paid from the police service budget, and the social worker's salary is paid by health services.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you for that.

You have five members on that team. If you don't mind my asking, are the social workers on that team paid through the police service or through health services?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: Social workers are paid by health services, i.e. hospitals. In our region, this is the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux, or CIUSSS de l'Estrie. Confidentiality is a basic principle. So there are built-in barriers. Social workers cannot reveal everything to the police. They must therefore remain employees of the health services to maintain their access to information. That is why they are paid by health services. Some police organizations pay their social workers, but we do not.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you for that.

As you explained in your opening remarks, sir, mental health crises and police interventions are increasing exponentially across the country. They've been increasing for decades. The policing community seems to be the one responsible for responding to this.

You explained how you do this, and I'm curious to know more. If I understand you correctly, if you have a person in crisis, the specialized members of this unit respond, with responding units. Once the coast is clear and the risk is mitigated, the patrol officers leave and the specialized unit stays there. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: That's right.

I have been working in the mental health sector for several years. The fundamental problem will always be within the purview of social workers, but dangerousness will always fall under policing. When we arrive on the scene and the threat is removed, the generalist police officers leave the scene and one of the five specialist police officers stays with a trained social worker who will provide the necessary care or assistance to the person.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there, Mr. Motz.

Thank you, Inspector Roy.

Madame Lambropoulos, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

[*Translation*]

My first question will be directed to representatives of the Sherbrooke Police Department.

A man was killed in an altercation with Montreal police. The man was Sheffield Matthews, a 41-year-old man described by those who knew him as a father who had spent most of his money on his children. He worked in a seniors' residence and had experienced poverty. He was considered a caring, considerate, and hard-working person.

[*English*]

He was someone whom many people from a similar background looked up to as a beacon of hope. He was going through a crisis at the time he was found by police on that morning in NDG. He was shot because he was found wielding a knife, and I guess the policemen who were there felt threatened.

I'd like to know if you can tell us what the protocol would be in such a situation. What should it have been in order for this innocent man, or someone who overall is a good person, to not be shot by people who are there to protect society and to protect citizens? Rather than his being killed at the hands of police, what do you think should have happened in that situation? How can we prevent situations like this from happening again?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: This is a very good question.

I can't comment on this particular event because I don't know all the details. The only thing I can tell you is that in Quebec, police officers are not trained to kill someone in order to save their life. Obviously, when a person is suicidal, it is not the police officer's mandate to kill them to save their life.

On the other hand, it is not the mandate of the police officer to be killed by a person who, unfortunately, has mental health problems. I'm not talking about this particular event because I don't have the details. However, if a police officer arrives at the scene of a call, as happened in the case you mentioned, and a person opens the door with a baseball bat and runs at him, he will still have to defend himself with the tools at his disposal depending on the threat. This is the notion of dangerousness. Do we want this? Do we wish for this? No police officer wants to have to do such a thing.

Unfortunately, we are sometimes called upon to react to an aggression. Are there other tools that could be used? Could these calls be directed to a social worker instead of a police officer? Again, the notion of dangerousness is managed by the police, while the crisis and assistance is managed by health services. If health care workers were sent directly to the scene, they would be exposed to accidents.

Police officers are sometimes faced with situations where they have no choice but to intervene to protect themselves or others from a potential assault by a sick person. In Quebec, fundamentally, a police officer is not trained to kill someone in an attempt to save their life.

● (1555)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

My next question is for you, Mr. Babineau. Thank you for being with us today.

I'm quite new to the committee and I haven't heard much testimony, but I'd like to take this opportunity to ask you the following question.

Last week, Mr. Bastarache was here to tell us about the systemic misogyny that exists within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP.

What do you think makes racism systemic in the RCMP? Can you give us some examples and tell us why you think it is systemic racism?

Mr. Alain Babineau: I can answer in French or English.

[*English*]

First of all, the RCMP has been plagued by systemic racism throughout history. We can go back to the “March West”. We can go back to residential schools, Black activism in Nova Scotia in the 1960s, 911 national security and, lately, racial profiling of Blacks and indigenous people right across Canada, so there's nothing new there.

You can go back to 1941, when you had two Black Nova Scotians who applied to join the RCMP. They were perceived as problems for the RCMP. It was offered to them to write the entrance exam, in the hope that they would fail. Coincidentally, they failed the exam. It wasn't until the 1970s that the RCMP got their first Black member within the organization. There has been a systemic pattern throughout history that cannot be denied.

I'll give you a quick example. For two and a half years when I worked in the RCMP, I assisted a member of the RCMP who was denied promotion on three separate occasions within the same unit that he had been part of for 15 years. The last time he was denied promotion, the person who was promoted was a white individual, and the Black officer had trained that person. Everybody in the unit couldn't believe that this was happening.

What happened is that we filed grievances and we filed for disclosures. Lo and behold, we learned that the decision-maker in that particular case had been disciplined for using racial slurs against Black people in a previous post. This person was put in a decision-making position for a promotional board, and a Black person was a candidate.

Was that person racist? I don't know, but a reasonable person would think that this decision-maker should not have been on that promotional board as a decision-maker. That's part of the systemic discrimination policy that we need to eradicate—

The Chair: We're going to have to leave the answer there.

Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to address Mr. Babineau first.

Mr. Babineau, I know that you are a law enforcement analyst. I'm going to continue in the same vein as my colleague Mr. Motz, who spoke earlier about the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP.

If I understand correctly, the process is not that independent after all. When a member of the public wants to make a complaint, they send their request to the commission, but the commission immediately refers it to the RCMP. That's where a review is done. If the complainant is not satisfied with the RCMP's response, or if the commission is not satisfied with the response, a second review is undertaken. It can take 10 or 15 months—and sometimes longer—before the complainant receives a response. In your view, should the process be more independent?

Given what was described in the Bastarache report, should there also be an independent body for RCMP officers and employees who have suffered damage in the RCMP?

● (1600)

Mr. Alain Babineau: Yes, absolutely.

As a complaints manager, I handled complaints that were referred to us by the external committee. These complaints were investigated internally.

In all honesty, I have found that police officers and RCMP members are often harsher on their own colleagues than an outside agency would be. At the same time, there is this perception of independence that needs to be maintained.

I would add that this puts police officers who have to investigate a colleague in a precarious position, because eventually they may find themselves working with that colleague, and even being under his command.

There should be a totally independent body, much like the Police Ethics Commissioner in Quebec or Ontario, who is totally independent. The same should apply to the RCMP.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

In your opening remarks, you said that there should be more examination of the policies, practices and standards that are in place. Several studies have come to the same conclusion: there is systemic racism in Canadian policing.

This is our last meeting on the subject. Several solutions were proposed to us. I would like to know your opinion on the studies you have done and what you have observed.

What do you propose at this stage? What should be the federal government's action plan to address systemic racism?

Mr. Alain Babineau: As I said, there are two parts to this.

The first component deals with racial profiling in all its forms. Certainly there should be a federal anti-racial profiling law that all police forces in the country would be subject to, especially when they want to obtain funding for mental health programs or to fight organized crime, for example.

Police services in Quebec should have an internal policy to counter racial profiling and provide training to police officers, as well as be open to diversity in their workforce. This should be essential if police services want to obtain federal funding to conduct their operations. Otherwise, there will be no real change on this front.

The second area is diversity in policing. Unfortunately, Quebec is the worst province in the country when it comes to diversity; it's shameful. Again, there is a lack of accountability in this regard and it is difficult to recruit members from communities that feel oppressed by police services. So there is a lot of marketing work to be done to get people from these communities to come and work in police services that are traditionally white.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Indeed, a great deal of work must be done to attract people from all walks of life.

Do you think that the most racialized communities or cultural communities, such as indigenous people, are reluctant to join the police because they see police officers as enemies or people whom they don't trust?

● (1605)

Mr. Alain Babineau: Unfortunately, that's true and that's the issue.

First, the communities aren't reflected within the police departments. I'm thinking specifically of Quebec. Second, they feel oppressed by the police.

A Black person would be a bit of a masochist if they wanted to work, for example, in the Quebec City police department. This department has never hired a single Black person in over 100 years.

There's so much work to do in terms of diversifying police departments. It's a major challenge.

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, your time is up.

[*English*]

Mr. Harris, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Babineau, you have spent quite a long career in the RCMP. As a Black man, can you tell us about your experience? I know you related one incident of an apparently race-based refusal of a promotion.

What about your own experience? What was that like being in the force? You were presumably outnumbered, but what was your experience? Could you give us an idea of that?

Mr. Alain Babineau: This is an interesting question.

As a Black person, in all spheres of life and in all organizations, you're subject to microaggression on a daily basis. Those are the things you learn to live with, but it stays with you. It could be anything from jokes, to innuendos, to challenging you about recent events to try to find out what your personal opinion would be.

I'll give you a quick example of one time when I was in the drug section in Toronto. In drug units, you play hard and you work hard. You have to be tough-skinned to be a part of those units. I was standing in the middle of a meeting one time where we were planning a drug project in the Jane and Finch area of Toronto, and this member had come from up north. He had spent a number of years in an isolated post. It was his first time in Toronto dealing with different...Black communities, for instance. He was standing there and he said that those niggers are just like those Indians up north.

That is the kind of overall opinion...he was drawing an inference from his experience in dealing with criminality where he was up north. Now he was having to conduct drug enforcement and he was looking at those people as having the same kind of mentality as those he had been exposed to in his previous post.

That was as I was standing right there. It was like I was invisible. Again, it becomes part of the way people express themselves. They stereotype everybody who comes from a particular culture as being potentially involved with criminality. That's the problem.

Mr. Jack Harris: Former justice Bastarache—

The Chair: Mr. Harris, I just want to reflect on the use of certain language, even in the context of this conversation. There have been some real difficulties that our overall society has had with some use of some words. I just want, in future as we go through our testimony, to avoid the use of certain language.

With that, you can continue, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I was about to say that former justice Bastarache testified before this committee last week about his report in dealing with the Merlo-Davidson assessment of the class action lawsuit against women suffering from harassment—and worse, as women in the RCMP.

In his report he concluded that in the RCMP, there was a toxic culture of misogyny, homophobia and racism. Would you care to comment on that, based on your experience in the RCMP for 27 years, I believe?

● (1610)

Mr. Alain Babineau: It was 27 and a half years.

I don't think the RCMP is any worse nor better than most of the larger police services in this country when it comes to these kinds of issues.

Mr. Jack Harris: I can accept that comparison between the RCMP and other police forces.

Is that a true statement based on your experience? Is there a toxic culture, or was there a toxic culture?

Mr. Alain Babineau: That's a fair statement.

The refusal to even recognize that it exists is...The same thing happened with those brave women who came forward, initially, to report sexual harassment in the RCMP. They were met with sarcasm and denial. They were even attacked.

Since I've come forward in sharing my experiences, I've been attacked and doubted. People don't believe me. They think I'm making this stuff up. That's the reality we live with in the RCMP.

I'm in contact with police officers right across Canada, from various police organizations, and it's the same in most of the large police organizations. There's this lack of belief that these things exist. Until we get a grip, and recognize there's a problem, we'll have to go through the same process that the female officers had to go through, and are still going through, quite frankly.

Mr. Jack Harris: Could you reflect on whether that attitude or culture, if we use that word, carried through in terms of the actual carrying on of.... You mentioned at the beginning in passing that racism existed in terms of the service provided, as well.

Was that behaviour reflected in how others, who were interacting with the RCMP, were treated when you were there?

Mr. Alain Babineau: Do you mean in terms of service delivery?

Mr. Jack Harris: It was suggested, for example, by many of the women, who talked to Justice Bastarache as part of this lawsuit that the attitude toward women in the force itself was also reflected in how the members of the force treated women or indigenous people whom they were supposed to be interacting with or protecting?

The Chair: We're going to have to leave the question there, as Mr. Harris is way over his time. Maybe you could circle back to the answer at some point, because it is an important question.

Colleagues, we have 15 minutes, and we have 25 minutes of questions in the next round.

I'm going to arbitrarily drop a minute off everybody's questioning time. That way, we'll be somewhere close to the time that we've allocated.

Mr. Kurek, you now have four minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you, and thanks to our witnesses for your service in our communities.

I understand that time is short, but this question is directed to the officers from the Sherbrooke police. You mentioned outcomes at the end of your opening remarks.

Would you briefly summarize the benefits and outcomes of the program you've described to us?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: The benefit of our mobile psychosocial intervention team's programs is certainly to prevent the revolving door phenomenon, meaning people entering hospitals and leaving immediately. These programs also make it possible to develop police responses that better suit the situations and to increase our organization's expertise.

Here's a very worthwhile point for you. Our mobile team makes it possible to avoid prosecuting people on some occasions. It certainly makes it possible to avoid overprosecuting them. Our team provides an incredible added value.

Moreover, it maximizes the chances that a response will end peacefully. I don't have any figures about the use of force to provide today. However, I can tell you that our police officers in the mobile psychosocial intervention team have conducted about 300 follow-ups on recurring cases in the past year. These are certainly cases for which our organization would have received calls for our general patrol officers to handle. Confrontations could then have occurred.

Someone asked me earlier how to avoid this situation. In our organization, each time we proactively avoid the need for a response involving people with mental health issues, it's significant. By conducting about 300 follow-ups on recurring cases, we certainly have another chance to avoid the use of force. We're sure of this.

Mental health calls have doubled since 2015. However, we've seen a 30% decrease in ambulance transportation. We're avoiding unnecessary hospitalizations.

In short, we're seeing these direct benefits.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much. I appreciate that and I wanted to give you a chance to follow up on those remarks.

I have—

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Damien Kurek: —about a minute and a half, so to our other witness, regarding mental health, while police have some training, mental health is not generally seen to be the expertise of a police officer.

In your experience, what response models have you seen to ensure that there are effective mental health responses by police officers responding to the wide variety of challenges they would face?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: Our specialist police officers have taken extensive training. General police officers in Quebec are increasingly taking the training provided by the Quebec national police school and social services on how to respond to people with mental health issues. The school has even overhauled its courses on tactical communication and active listening to encourage de-escalation. Police officers in Quebec, and not only the officers in Sherbrooke, have more and more access to this type of training.

To better handle a person with a mental health issue, we must know what their illness is. We often lack this information when we respond on the ground, whereas the social services have this information. Depending on the illness, the de-escalation training gives our police officers ways to communicate and ensure optimal responses.

For example, we don't respond to a person with schizophrenia in the same way that we would respond to a person suffering from depression. We don't communicate in the same way with a person who has manic depression or with someone who poses a high risk of committing an act.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: That's what matters.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Inspector Roy.

Madam Damoff, you have four minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses.

I have a quick question for you, Monsieur Roy, from the Sherbrooke police. You mentioned that when you changed your mental health response, you went to five full-time police officers who specialized in mental health, and you still have the other ones who are partnered.

Can I ask why you didn't just go with five full-time mental health professionals?

The Chair: Monsieur Roy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Roy: We still have both. We have social workers four nights a week, but we want to be able to hire them. In a second or third phase, the partnership with the social workers should be improved.

The perfect model is a police officer accompanied by a social worker. I know that I'm repeating myself. The police officer manages the danger aspect, prevents possible assaults and protects the social worker. The social worker protects the police officer in terms of the legitimacy of the officer's response.

We have five full-time police officers who have developed expertise in mental health. It would be good to have a social worker and a police officer on a joint team at all times, seven days a week. We currently have social workers only four nights a week.

● (1620)

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. All right.

Mr. Babineau, thank you for your testimony. As you've heard, we had Justice Bastarache here last week, and I want to quote from his report. He said that harassment and discrimination are perpetrated by what many women describe as the old boys' club, referring to a network they say exists between men, and now like-minded women, “that asserts control over the RCMP and how it approaches change, who it promotes and who it holds back”.

Does this old boys' club also prevent Black officers from advancing in their careers, and do you think that the changes Justice Bastarache included in his report would change that old boys' club that currently exists?

Mr. Alain Babineau: Some of the recommendations might assist in changing the old boys' club, but the old girls' club, well, it's not an old girls' club, but some of the old girls have been joining the club and that's problematic.

However, to be quite frank with you, the RCMP in 2011 put forth a gender respect plan. At the time, it was ordered by the federal government to put in place an affirmative action program, essentially, not only to recruit but also to push through and promote a significant number of females right through the ranks. Nine years later, what you have is the RCMP commissioner, who's female, and you have nearly 35% of all commissioned officers in the RCMP who are female, but largely, white female.

I'll give you an example—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you know what percentage of the RCMP are Black?

Mr. Alain Babineau: I think there are about 300 to 350 Blacks, roughly. Again, there are no disaggregated numbers in the RCMP that have been collected. That's just anecdotal.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. I'm sorry to interrupt you. I just was curious.

Mr. Alain Babineau: The plan, the gender and respect plan, actually worked in terms of promoting women, white women particularly, and hiring more white women, but the BIPOC females did not benefit from that program the same way that white females benefited.

I know I have 30 seconds left. I'll give you a quick example. The first Black—

The Chair: Unfortunately, we cannot take your quick example.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think we're actually out of time.

Mr. Alain Babineau: Oh, we're out of time. I don't want to get you in trouble.

The Chair: Yes. I'm already getting heat from the various whips' offices that we have two meetings stacked up behind us, and we have a very important second hour to talk, as well.

We'll to to Madame Michaud for one minute, and Mr. Harris for one minute.

[*Translation*]

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

For this short minute, I'll turn to you, Mr. Roy. I find the program that you established at the Sherbrooke police department quite inspiring. We could certainly export your model and ensure that general police officers become specialist police officers by working with social workers.

You said that people should be seen as individuals rather than suspects, which I particularly appreciated. By using words like these, we can start changing the toxic culture in all police departments.

What positive results have you seen on the ground? Could this model be exported elsewhere?

Mr. Patrick Roy: For the Sherbrooke police department, it's certainly the ideal model. The size of our police department makes it possible for us to have this team and these resources. My colleagues and I could no longer do without them. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, according to this morning's figures, we now spend 20.5 hours a day on mental health responses.

We've adjusted the work of all the teams during the COVID-19 crisis, including criminal investigations. Our mobile psychosocial intervention team is the only team that remains intact. The team is working tirelessly. It handles recurring cases and cases of psychological distress to ensure a peaceful outcome to calls.

We think that the model is fantastic. I think that other organizations could use it. However, I can't speak for them.

[*English*]

The Chair: Again, I apologize for cutting people off, but it is what it is.

Mr. Harris, to keep this within a minute would be a miracle.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair. I'll give most of my minute to Mr. Babineau to finish the answer to my question about Justice Bastarache's view that there was a toxic culture, including misogyny, homophobia and racism, in the RCMP.

Is that reflected in how they treat members of the public?

● (1625)

Mr. Alain Babineau: It has to be. It has to be because you couldn't be displaying racist behaviour against your own colleague without having it reflected amongst the clients you serve. As I said, personally I have seen it in some of the attitudes and comments I've heard about members of the Black community, so the answer would be yes.

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there.

Mr. Jack Harris: That, of course, wouldn't be everybody, but that's part of the culture.

Mr. Alain Babineau: Again, systemic racism doesn't mean everybody is racist.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Van Popta, you have four minutes.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Good. Thank you very much.

Mr. Babineau, I'm just going to pick up right where you left off. Earlier in your testimony you gave what I thought was a very good working definition of what systemic racism is, and that, of course, is the central theme of this whole study.

Maybe you could repeat that. I think it would be advantageous for us to have that in testimony, as we're putting our report together, to have a good working definition of the term.

Mr. Alain Babineau: I can't take credit for that definition. I was quoting Senator Sinclair's definition of racism. Essentially he said that some people believe that systemic racism is when everybody in the system is a racist, and there is no system where everybody is a racist. Then he went on to clarify it this way:

> Systemic racism is when the system itself is based upon and founded upon racist beliefs and philosophies and thinking and has put in place policies and practices that literally force even the non-racists to act in a racist way.

The biggest backlash we get to this idea of systemic racism—and we find that here in Quebec—is this automatic fear that we're accusing everybody of being a racist, but that is not the case. That is not the case at all.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for that.

In your many years of experience in working in the police services, have you seen improvement in systemic racism? Do we have less of it today than we did, let's say, 20 years ago?

Mr. Alain Babineau: No.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: It's not moving in the right direction?

Mr. Alain Babineau: I don't think so, definitely not in terms of systemic racism. It's more sophisticated. It's more insidious, but it's still pervasive. It's still very much present and the biggest challenge is the backlash that any attempt at changing the status quo creates among the majority of the membership, and you can use the Ottawa Police Service as an example. It has a Black chief who has tried to put in place some new practices and policies and diversity, and he's suffered a tremendous backlash from his membership.

We must take heed that this is not an easy battle. This is not an easy fix.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Justice Bastarache was in front of us last week and he's been quoted a couple of times at this meeting already as having stated that the culture in the RCMP is toxic. I asked him if it can even be fixed.

I'm going to put that question to you too. Can the RCMP even be fixed, or does it have to be dismantled? Do we have to have another model of policing altogether?

Mr. Alain Babineau: It has nothing to do with the model. The RCMP can be fixed. As I said, I'm going to go back to the gender and respect plan that was put in place in 2011 to address sexual harassment, and also diversity with respect to females, in the RCMP. I think it has done quite well, and although misogyny and harassment probably still exist, I dare you to find any organization, regardless of its being a police organization, where it doesn't exist at all.

I think it's done quite well.

I want to give an example of the first Black female in the RCMP at commission rank who was promoted 13 years ago. Typically within two and a half years, you get your next bump to officer rank. Well, 13 years later, she's still at the first rank of the officer level and the folks who were constables, which is the very bottom of the barrel of the RCMP, are now her bosses. So you have to ask yourself a question: Are we making this stuff up? I don't think so.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Popta.

For the final four minutes we have Mr. Lightbound.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

My first question is for Mr. Babineau.

Mr. Babineau, during this study, several people have told us about the cadets' experience at the RCMP Depot. The culture created at Depot is more military than police. As a result, the training doesn't properly address the systemic racism issues.

Can you briefly describe your experience? What are your thoughts on Depot?

Mr. Alain Babineau: I'll tell you about my experience at Depot. When I trained there, I was one of the only Black cadets in the RCMP. In my troop, during that time, I saw maybe five or six other Black cadets.

The worst example of systemic and explicit racism that I saw at Depot was the racism against indigenous people. We saw indigenous troops, special troops and indigenous special constables who came from all over the place, from various indigenous and even Inuit territories. The displays of racism that these individuals experienced, the absolutely unbelievable comments that these people heard—I can tell you that it was appalling. This was my first exposure to this type of racism against indigenous people.

I'll give you another example. I was recently contacted by a cadet who just completed his training at Depot, a Black cadet who is now working at his first job. He told me about some very difficult things that he experienced during his training. He heard many comments, especially about the Black Lives Matter movement. People were always trying to challenge him to see how he would react. This has continued at his first job. His peers are watching him all the time, because he's going through a probationary period. They want to see how he'll react to the Black Lives Matters movement, among other things. Mr. Lightbound, 30 years later, I can say that systemic racism still exists.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: That answers my question to some extent. Since you served in the forces for 27 years, this goes back a bit. The sad fact is that things haven't necessarily changed or evolved as much as they should have.

Do you have any recommendations for the committee on how to attract more RCMP members from diverse backgrounds?

Mr. Alain Babineau: Again, it's a matter of marketing. First, there must be a concrete commitment to address complaints of racial harassment within the RCMP.

[*English*]

I will say that the RCMP recently put out an anti-racism plan. I have to tell you that it's a meaningless plan. It's full of pronouncements and huge principles, and unless they put forward something.... Again, I'm going back to the gender and respect plan from 2011 that addressed systemic harassment, sexual harassment, and discrimination against females. Unless they put something like that forward and it's being implemented and monitored by the government, and also with the help of the Black communities and folks from those Black communities, you won't see any changes. You can recruit people, but the question is how they are going to be treated once they get into the organization.

Quite frankly, it's a whole lot of work, and it cannot be done from the inside. The RCMP cannot do it on its own.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Thank you.

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

The Chair: Your time is up.

● (1635)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Okay.

I want to thank all our witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I want to thank both of our witnesses today. As you can see, the committee is very engaged in this study, and your contribution will be recognized not only in the record but also in our summary of evidence as we attempt to make some effort to put together a report and to ask the government to respond to it in an expeditious fashion.

Some of the testimony was encouraging, particularly the testimony by Inspector Roy. Other testimony was maybe not quite so encouraging.

With that, colleagues, I'm going to adjourn this meeting. I'm not suspending it, but adjourning it because we have to sign out and then sign back in. All of you have received your virtual codes to sign back in. The sooner we do that, the sooner we can get on to our in camera meeting.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.