

Caucus Committee on Crime Reduction

March 7, 2017

Honourable Brad Wall
Premier of Saskatchewan

Dear Premier Wall,

In November 2016, you ordered the formation of a special Crime Reduction Committee to examine the issue of crime in Saskatchewan. Crime is not relegated to any one specific community, or urban centre; from property crime, to gangs, to drug trafficking, communities across Saskatchewan are affected in their own ways.

In order to get a broad, comprehensive, and province-wide picture of these issues, our Committee consisted of MLAs from across the province and has toured various locations around the province to meet with different organizations, individuals, and communities.

Our Committee sent out over 300 invitations to various stakeholders across Saskatchewan to invite them to present to our Committee when we were touring their area. The Committee toured 10 communities over 12 days and met with 58 stakeholders. Written submissions were also accepted and reviewed by the Committee.

The goal of the Committee was to determine which policies are effective in reducing crime, and what best-practices can be used to reduce crime in other areas. After considering all testimony and written submissions, the Committee has summarized the major issues relating to crime throughout the province and has made 8 recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to work on this important initiative.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Herb Cox', written over a faint horizontal line.

Herb Cox, Chair, Crime Reduction Committee
MLA The Battlefords

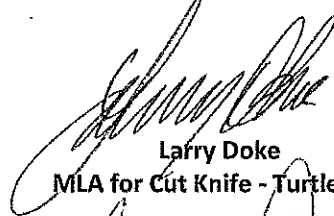
COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE



**Herb Cox, Chair
MLA for The Battlefords**



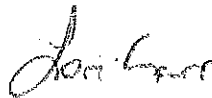
**Jennifer Campeau, Vice Chair
MLA for Saskatoon Fairview**



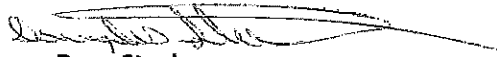
**Larry Doke
MLA for Cut Knife - Turtleford**



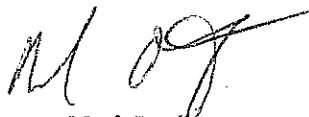
**Terry Dennis
MLA for Canora - Pelly**



**Lori Carr
MLA for Estevan**



**Doug Steele
MLA for Cypress Hills**



**Mark Docherty
MLA for Regina Coronation Park**

THE CAUSES OF CRIME IN SASKATCHEWAN

The Crime Reduction Committee met with stakeholders from around the province to examine the issues and causes of crime in Saskatchewan. Over 300 invitations were sent out to organizations, communities, and individuals inviting them to present to the Committee or to submit a written presentation. The Committee toured 10 communities over 12 days and met with 58 stakeholders. The following report is a summary of what the Committee heard about the causes of crime in Saskatchewan.

As the Committee heard from stakeholders and evaluated written submissions, a number of trends emerged. In order to accurately depict those trends in this report, the trends have been broken down into four sections with a number of sub-categories. Those sections include: Justice, Urban, Rural, and First Nations. It is important to note that although the categories assist in being able to accurately depict the Committee's findings, there was a great deal of overlap as no single issue that the Committee heard was isolated.

Justice

Throughout the province, the Crime Reduction Committee heard many concerns regarding the administration of Justice. The most common concerns that were heard were in regards to policing in Saskatchewan, particularly the RCMP. Concerns about the ineffectivity of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* were also heard in many of the meetings.

Policing

In every region of the province that the Committee toured, there were concerns about policing. The majority of those concerns were in regards to the RCMP. In almost every region of the province, the committee heard concerns about the low staffing levels of the RCMP. Almost every detachment was short-staffed due to various reasons, such as, maternity and paternity leave, sick leave, vacation, etc. This leaves the remaining RCMP members having to do their own tasks as well as carry the workload of the missing members. Although many stakeholders understood that the RCMP were working to the best of their abilities with limited personnel, they were very concerned with the vacancies affecting their ability to effectively do their job. Many of the rural municipalities (RMs) felt that the money that they were spending on RCMP officers was not being fully utilized.

Concerns regarding visibility, response time, and community engagement were heard throughout the province. Citizens did not feel as if the RCMP were visible enough in their community to deter crime and that, in some cases, their slow response times allowed the criminal to get away. Many also felt that due to the short-term postings, local RCMP were not engaged in the community and as such, did not know the landowners or the layout of the rural community.

It should also be noted that school liaison officers were requested in most of the communities. School liaison officers can be stationed in schools to make connections with the youth, so that they are comfortable speaking with the officer about crimes committed or potential crimes. The officer's visibility in the school also acts as a deterrent for crime and the officer can swiftly respond if a situation arises. School liaison officers also spend time in classrooms to educate youth on the negative effects of crime, namely drug use and gang activity. Some of the communities that were visited by the Committee had current school liaison officers, while others had previously had a school liaison officer. All respondents noted the positive effect that they had in the community.

There were also conversations about how to help the RCMP and local police services be more effective. While meeting with law enforcement stakeholders, the Committee heard that there was technology available that could help law enforcement do their job more effectively. Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR) is a technology that police services have begun to utilize, due to an initiative SGI rolled out last year to install these units on police cars. With expanded province wide data sharing, the benefits of this technology could allow for police to see whether vehicles they pass are registered, whether drivers have a record, if the vehicle is stolen, and if the driver is considered dangerous. The testimonials of how effective this technology is was astounding, as the technology informs officers which vehicles need to be pulled over. ALPR allows police to focus on more serious matters and further increases officer safety, as they will be warned if the vehicle or its owner is high risk, allowing officers to take precautions.

Stakeholders suggested that increased rollout of ALPRs would make policing across the province more effective. There were also some suggestions as to how these could be funded, from cost-sharing with SGI, to having the province negotiate bulk purchase discounts and municipalities cover all the costs, to working with SARM and SUMA to coordinate the rollout. It should also be noted that some of the police forces that have purchased ALPRs have seen the full cost of the machine paid for in fine revenue in as little as a few months. Further, there are also options to attach ALPRs to the major entry points in a city to be able to flag high risk vehicles entering the city. This would allow police forces to monitor high risk individuals' movement in their communities. However, the problem of data management consistently came up as an issue with integrating ALPRs into multiple communities.

Presently, each police force is responsible for the majority of their data management. Police access different systems to look up different kinds of information relevant to their jobs, whether this is through the Ministry of Justice, SGI, or others. Several stakeholders suggested that the province should implement a province-wide data management system, which would consolidate the various systems that presently exist. British Columbia and Ontario have done something similar to this and law enforcement emphasized that this simplifies their work. One of the biggest benefits of this is that ALPRs would be connected to this system, allowing for seamless data integration for police to effectively utilize this tool.

Prisoner transport was another area where technology could help the RCMP. With the Provost program, RCMP detachments must give up an officer to do prisoner transport, as well as court security. This can take a full day, which means that officer is not being used to solve or prevent crime. Video court has become more common and this allows the prisoner to appear in court without having to physically be there. The video conference can be held at the prison and the prisoner does not have to be transferred, saving valuable resources. The Committee heard that this technology works great but is not being used as often as it could be.

Alternative Policing

As many communities felt that they were not being fully serviced by the RCMP, there were numerous discussions about alternate policing models. These models and the officers that would be added would not replace the RCMP, but instead work in cooperation with them. Some communities had already hired RCMP alternatives and most of those communities had great success. The alternatives that were presented were: Community Safety Officers, Community Constables, Auxiliary Constables, Peace Officers, Citizens on Patrol, and Rural Crime Watch. These options allow for communities to tailor the appropriate services with their needs. Some communities decided to hire a Community Constable as they felt they needed a higher level of protection, while other communities found Rural Crime Watches worked well in deterring crime.

While certain communities were happy with the additional safety services, many stakeholders did note that they were already paying a fairly high amount for the services of the RCMP and that they should not have to pay for additional safety services. Sharing the cost between RMs would help, and certain communities were willing to work together. However, the committee heard from multiple stakeholders that current legislation does not allow two or more RMs to jointly fund an additional officer. This made it even more difficult for communities to be able to fund alternative policing models.

There was also a discussion that RMs and municipalities should be given the opportunity to hire municipal police forces to take care of their policing needs, as opposed to the traditional RCMP policing model. In some regions, municipalities may be better served by supporting regional police forces as opposed to having to pay for their own safety officers or RCMP. It was also felt that when city police forces developed a greater regional presence, it could help make city police forces more effective.

Youth Criminal Justice Act

Across the province, the Committee heard concerns that the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was not enough of a deterrent to stop youth from committing crimes. In some cases, family, friends, and gangs were encouraging youth to commit crimes on their behalf because they knew that the youth would not suffer as severe repercussions if caught. There were comments that the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was not deterring or helping to rehabilitate youth; it was instead protecting them from consequences so that they were not concerned about re-offending. There was an overwhelming number of suggestions by stakeholders to revise the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* so that it would appropriately deter and rehabilitate youth to prevent them from committing crimes in the future.

Urban

As the committee met with urban stakeholders from across the province, some clear themes emerged. The most prevalent was that illegal drugs are an increasing issue. The widespread use of drugs and addictions is not only an issue in and of itself, but it was very clear that drugs are one of the leading factors contributing to growing crime rates. There were also discussions related to the need for a change in the way the root causes of crime are addressed and the need for increased strategies to address those topics. Further, urban police forces and urban municipalities had some creative solutions to increase the effectiveness of policing as outlined in this report.

Drugs, Gangs and Violence

Drug use in Saskatchewan has been on the rise, notably: alcohol, crystal meth, cocaine, marijuana, and others to a lesser extent. It should be noted that the issue of fentanyl was brought up on several occasions, along with its devastating effects. Police forces and municipal governments indicated that although they have seen some cases of fentanyl in the province, they have been able to effectively keep it out of the drug supply chain thus far.

Alcohol abuse was brought up as a key issue in urban centers provincially. It is seen as a key factor related to mental health and wellness. Alcohol also further increases instances of domestic abuse, assault, and petty theft.

The next drug that was brought up by urban stakeholders was crystal meth. Because of its prevalence, the low production cost, ability to process it locally, and its highly addictive properties, it has become a major issue. In one of the stakeholder meetings, the Committee heard that the amount of crystal meth

incidences has increased by 1,325% from 2012-2016 in one of Saskatchewan's larger urban centers, though it should be noted that its prevalence is also increasing in rural areas as well. The effects of this drug on urban centers, however, manifests in gangs, violence, and property theft. Because of the addictive properties of the drug, police forces explained to the committee that many dealers give out crystal meth for free to get people hooked and then integrate these people into the gang structure at the lowest level as a user. These individuals become increasingly involved as their dependency increases. Because meth is an amphetamine stimulant, it also has increased the violence of gang interactions. Unlike the subdued high of opioids and many other street drugs, meth causes users to feel invincible and leads them to do things that traditionally gang violence would not promote. One stakeholder described this as "gangs no longer subscribe to a code". One of the effects of this is that it has also increased the number crimes that are committed with firearms. Violence with Firearms was reported to have increased by almost 300% from 2012-2016 in one of Saskatchewan's urban centers. Stakeholders in police, municipalities, and public services indicated this drug has been especially taxing on their services and will require a reexamination of how gangs and addictions are addressed.

It is important to note that other drugs were brought up and are still a concern in regards to addictions and gangs, but the focus was definitely on crystal meth. There were some concerns also raised about the legalization of marijuana and its unknown effect on at-risk communities.

It was also noted that there is currently no exit strategy for gang members who would like to leave their gang. Regina used to have the RAGS program (Regina Anti-Gang Strategy), but that program is no longer available. If there are no supports to help gang members leave their gangs, it is very unlikely that they will leave or be able to leave safely, even if they want to.

Interagency Cooperation

The committee heard from a number of stakeholders who believed that there were enough programs to help prevent crime, but that their effectiveness is greatly limited due to agency silos that exist in providing those services to people in need. The HUB and COR models were brought up with both positive and negative feedback. Yet every stakeholder acknowledged the importance of interagency supports to be provided seamlessly. This seamless delivery of programs would reduce failure and would have the added benefit of reducing cost if the system works more efficiently.

Urban Policing

Although it is addressed in the policing section, it is important to note that there are some urban specific issues that were brought up related to urban police innovation. One of the key elements of crime being addressed in urban centers is acknowledging that there needs to be a change in the way policing happens. Different strategies touch on having different levels of policing in the city to ensure resources are effectively distributed (bylaw enforcement, traffic enforcement, and crime prevention being part of it). Further, there are examples where police have integrated other services, like mental health and addictions, policy changes that have eliminated missing persons 24-hour wait times and regional policing strategies.

Rural

In each meeting, there were very clear issues that were brought up that were directly related to rural concerns. The rising crime rates that affect every person in the province are seen by rural residents to be disproportionately affecting them. There were three issues that were brought up that were consistently

discussed. First, challenges that exist in rural law enforcement, in terms of police, access to services, and the disparity of resources leading to excessive response time. Second, the committee heard that while progress is being made in urban centers in terms of addressing crime (and the causes of crime), the crime is being pushed out of the cities and being relocated into the rural areas. Third, rural residents are responding to growing crime rates by defending themselves in any way they feel necessary, because they feel they are not being responded to.

Further, rural stakeholders brought up a range of concerns that both fit with the three aforementioned subjects and others.

Rural Law Enforcement/Policing

This is addressed specifically in the policing part of this report, there are, however, some themes that specifically relate to rural concerns. Rural residents are confronted with the vast geographic area that a limited number of law enforcement officers are able to police. This has led to long response times and a lack of police visibility that stakeholders felt could be addressed by adjusting policing models such as integrating services with Community Safety Officers, Community Constables, Auxiliary Constables, Peace Officers, Citizens on Patrol, and Rural Crime Watch.

Relocation of Crime

As progress has been made in dealing with crime and the causes of crime in the urban centers, there has been a relocation of that traditionally urban crime to increasingly rural areas. The result is that drugs, gangs, and violent crime are more prevalent in rural parts of the province where the perpetrators of those crimes are able to avoid law enforcement. The manifestation of this is most easily seen through the increase of break and enters and theft on rural properties.

Rural Citizens Taking the Law in Their Own Hands

Some rural landowners shared with the committee that they have been victimized dozens of times, and the crimes are becoming more and more brazen. Further, the crime is organized and perpetrators seem to know when landowners are home, when they brought new equipment, vehicles, and supplies to their yards, and have developed ways to get around even the most extreme deterrence efforts. Several stakeholders shared how no deterrent has been effective and this has led to residents and their families no longer feeling safe and how they were forced to defend their own property. Further, the perpetrators are young (often young offenders) but are equipped with 'shopping' lists.

Rural landowners taking the law into their own hands was a comment that was heard by numerous stakeholders. Yet every time this was heard, those people communicated to the committee that they only did so because they felt they were out of options. This has led to rural residents carrying firearms in some cases, using their vehicles to push perpetrator's vehicles out of their yards, and have led to an increase in tensions between rural residents, surrounding First Nations, and police. Many stakeholders shared their concerns about recent events that have led to increased tension in the rural areas.

Rural residents are also looking for clarification on what they are allowed to do to protect their property. They have indicated frustration when they ask the police what is acceptable and received no response or what landowners feel are insufficient responses. They want to know what they can do, what constitutes protecting their property and what is illegal. It was shared that a clarification would assist in diminishing the chance of people getting hurt or killed in the future.

Lack of Communications between Rural Communities and First Nations

In areas where there was high tension between rural communities and First Nations communities, there was a distinct lack of communication between the two. Although some RMs, towns and village leaders commented that they work with the local First Nations community and vice versa, there was rarely evidence of such. For example, if asked whether one community had invited the other community to council meetings or set up regular meetings, the answer was usually no. This lack of communication has led to assumptions by both communities and has caused tension to grow.

Further Concerns

Rural stakeholders shared numerous issues that addressed a wide range of topics. This portion is meant to briefly outline some of the specific concerns that the Committee felt should be noted from rural stakeholders and presenters.

Drinking and driving remains a major concern for rural residents. The prevalence of the activity appears to be unchanged. Although those who brought this issue up appreciated the government's efforts to curb impaired driving, it remains a major challenge. Presenters indicated that they want stiffer penalties for repeat offenders and more enforcement in rural areas.

Illegal poaching is a lasting concern across the province. Several presenters indicated that there has not been sufficient enforcement to deter poachers. Similar to this issue is legal hunting on land where hunters do not have permission. Because of the tension and fear related to rural crime, there is uneasiness when landowners are confronted with people who claim to be hunting on their land and claim to have either asked permission or say they are lost. Landowners have observed that these poachers' true intentions are not always clear.

Cattle rustling was also brought up as a concern, as penalties and enforcement are outdated when modern rustling methods are impacting ranchers bottom lines.

Rural stakeholders also suggested that although there are efforts being made to have an increased rural crime watch (and the various iterations of that), more support would be appreciated. That support was suggested as: grants for software, information made readily available about how to set up crime watches, and encourage police forces to support local crime watch initiatives.

First Nations

The Committee met with First Nations groups from around the province, including Band Chiefs and Tribal Councils. Though it was clear that the many nations were very different, there were some common themes. Drug and alcohol abuse were the most prominent concern, as there are high rates of abuse which leads to an increase in other crimes. This was an issue especially in isolated communities where youth do not have access to a lot of activities or programming to keep them occupied. The Committee heard that kids who are not motivated to go to school or those who did not have a strong family support system to make them go to school were more likely to skip school to either sell or do drugs. Home life is difficult for many First Nations on reserve, as there are fewer on-reserve employment opportunities or support services than off-reserve.

Drugs and Alcohol

As was noted previously in the Urban section of this report, drugs are a problem across Saskatchewan and it is no different on First Nation reserves. In many of the First Nations communities that we spoke to, alcohol is the most abused substance. Various drugs are common as well, but the type of drug really depends on a community's isolation and access to drugs. The high rates of drug and alcohol abuse has led to increased crime on and off reserve. In some of the meetings, high rates of domestic abuse on certain reserves was directly linked to the high rate of substance abuse.

Employment

Another common theme heard by the Committee while meeting with First Nation communities was lack of employment opportunities, especially on reserve. Stakeholders noted that there are very few employment opportunities on most reserves and First Nations living on reserve have to travel to find work. This was especially difficult for isolated communities. It was explained to the Committee that in many First Nations cultures, there is a strong connection to home, community and family, which made many individuals reluctant to leave their home for work. The current economic downturn has made it even more difficult to find employment, even if they are willing to leave their reserve to find employment. Lack of employment opportunities and support services on reserve coupled with high rates of substance abuse has led to a very difficult home life for many in these communities.

Youth

Some of the First Nation communities that the Committee met with were having difficulty with increasing rates of youth crime. A major concern was that youth were not attending school on a regular basis, or at all. Kids that were not motivated to go to school, or those who did not have a strong family support system to make them go to school, were not likely to go, even if there were services that would pick them up and drop them off. Some kids who chose to skip school would use that time to sell drugs or commit other crimes to make money, such as break and enters. As discussed previously, many youths know that under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, they are less likely to incur severe punishment for their crimes and use this to their advantage. Lack of activities and after school programming also leads youth to crime. If they are bored and do not have activities to fill their time, they sometimes commit crimes because they have nothing better to do. This was especially true in isolated communities.

In numerous stakeholder meetings, the Committee heard that many First Nations youth are lacking cultural and self-identity. Without proper First Nations' cultural teaching in schools by local First Nations, many youth struggle with understanding cultural identity. This leads to further struggle with self-identity and finding their place in the world. This lack of identity and purpose can lead a youth to crime as well as depression and other mental health issues. In some cases, it has become a cycle of generational crime and abuse.

On Reserve Services

First Nations stakeholders noted that health, justice and social supports are lacking on many reserves. Services are available off reserve, but many are not able to travel or in cases of emergencies, they may not be able to access services in a timely manner. This is a complex issue as it may not necessarily be a lack of funds, but could also be due to other deficiencies. This could include an inability to find fully trained staff and in some cases, housing for staff coming from off the reserve. It was also noted that off-reserve service models do not necessarily work on reserve. Services need to be provided in consultation with the community to ensure their effectiveness. We also heard a number of First Nations stakeholders reference Jordan's Principle and how they would like to see those policies implemented.

Policing

Short staffed and low RCMP visibility were addressed in previous areas of the report, but it should be noted that these deficiencies were also identified on reserves and in First Nations Communities across the province. Specific to First Nations is the desire to have more First Nations policing reserves, the suggestion is to have these local police to work in coordination with the RCMP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan communicate with the RCMP (F Division) to ensure that the province has a full complement of police officers, as well as ensuring the best use of resources and increased visibility in rural areas. The Committee would like to further recommend that the Government explore options to reduce officers being taken off regular duties to transport prisoners and allow for greater access to video court appearances to reduce officer travel and court time.
2. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan review the legislation to allow two or more rural municipalities to jointly administer alternative policing programs. The Committee further recommends that the Government explore further options for regional policing models in the future.
3. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan lobby the Federal Government to strengthen the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* to ensure increased consequences for crimes committed by young offenders, increased consequences for adults enabling youth to commit crimes, and for greater rehabilitation supports for those offenders.
4. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan work with municipal partners, such as SARM and SUMA to develop a funding strategy to make automatic license plate recognition (ALPR) systems available in all police vehicles. The Committee further recommends that the Government look at making vehicle identification easier by adding front license plates to vehicles and encourage the development of a provincial interagency database for ALPRs to effectively identify suspect vehicles and drivers.
5. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan lobby the Federal Government to obtain the funding necessary for programming and services on reserve as it is off reserve. The committee would also like the Government to consider working with First Nations communities in implementing a HUB model on reserve to provide more collaborative care.
6. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan encourage police forces to appoint school liaison officers to do regular school visits in their respective policing regions. The Committee would like to emphasize that there is significant importance to relationships and continuance in building a trust relationship between police forces and youth. This would provide an effective avenue for police to be engaged in the process of educating children about the hazards of drugs, gangs, and crimes.
7. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan work with the Federal Government to restore federal funding for a gang exit strategy and make it available across the province.
8. We recommend that the Government of Saskatchewan explore expanding mental health and addictions treatment centers across the province. The Committee would also like to emphasize the importance of more timely access to these services to ensure a greater level of success.