



**Submission to the Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-Budget Consultations 2011

Ensuring Safe Communities

INTRODUCTION

The Police Association of Ontario (PAO) is a professional organization representing over 33,000 police and civilian members from every municipal police association and the Ontario Provincial Police Association. The PAO is committed to promoting the interests of front-line police personnel, to upholding the honour of the police profession, and to elevating the standards of Ontario's police services.

Our unified voice is a resource to government on all matters related to policing. Building on our common goal of making communities safer, we have shared our experience and expertise with successive governments on a number of important policy files. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into this important process. We would like to focus our attention on the important link between ensuring Ontario's place in a competitive world and safe communities.

The PAO believes that the upcoming Budget is an opportunity to demonstrate the Government's commitment to policing and community safety. We urge the Government to provide adequate long-term sustainable funding to ensure Ontario streets and communities remain safe and prosperous.

BACKGROUND

Ontarians have a right to feel safe in their homes, on their streets, while at play and in their schools. Safe communities create trust and comfort and attract investment. They can only lead to a stronger Ontario. While appreciative that there are many demands for funding, we believe that safe communities are a priority for the citizens that we serve.

Safe communities are part and parcel of ensuring Ontario's place in a competitive world. Historically, Ontario's "tough on crime" agenda has been one of the fundamental tenets for prosperity. In these tough economic times, the most important thing we can do is to maintain safe communities in order to attract new industry to Ontario.

Policing is dependant on professionally trained personnel. This is demonstrated by the fact that staffing accounts for approximately 90% of the costs in the operating budgets of police services across the province. In Ontario, these costs are borne by municipalities and the province. It has been our experience that for many reasons, municipalities are constantly looking at ways to lower the budgets of police services. Professional policing is compromised by these budget restraints and cutbacks. Despite budget shortfalls, police services across the province have endeavoured to provide effective levels of service and to meet taxpayer expectations of high quality. We simply cannot continue to provide the level of policing that people expect and demand without an expansion of the current staff complement.

Crime is becoming more sophisticated, organized and technically complex. Criminals are using cutting-edge technology and the police are not keeping pace. Criminal organizations do not face the budgetary restrictions faced by police agencies, which often prohibit or delay the acquisition of equipment or personnel. Investigations into these matters are very time and resource consuming and, in many cases, police must play catch-up with the criminal.

The effects of budget constraints are felt in every aspect of policing, from training to occupational health and safety, and are intensified by rising costs and expectations. Fiscal pressures appear to have the greatest impact on general patrol officers. As the specialization of policing tasks increases, resources are drawn from the patrol units. This places increased pressure on the remaining front-line personnel, contributing to stress and morale issues. It may also compromise the ability of police services to meet public expectations and internal service level standards.

While the range of duties has expanded for Canadian police, the increase in the number of police officers has not kept pace with the rate of population growth over most of the last decade. Statistics Canada has reported that the number of Canadian police officers per 100,000 population had increased steadily during the 1960s and early 1970s, peaking at 206 police officers per 100,000 population in 1975. Between 1975 and 1991, the number of police officers grew at about the same pace as the Canadian population, maintaining an average of around 200 police officers per 100,000 residents. The latest report indicates Canada has 203 police officers per 100,000 residents, still below the 1975 average.

The threat of terrorism has had a significant impact on law enforcement personnel. Police resources are stretched to the breaking point, responding to everyday calls.

However, high-profile arrests such as those of the 'Toronto 18' are claiming large shares of policing budgets to provide trial security and prisoner transfers. Our capacity to respond to terrorist threats must be addressed as an immediate priority.

Beyond terrorism, any special task force, while useful for its specific purpose, is not specially funded. It draws resources, both human and financial, from the day to day work which still needs to get done.

In order to maintain this level of safety, Police Services must be adequately staffed, trained, equipped and funded. This means keeping ongoing resources intact, despite whatever special needs might be identified at any given point in time.

RECOMMENDATION

Adequate Staffing for a Safer Ontario

The PAO believes that an industry standard needs to be developed for today's policing. A thorough review needs to capture the reality of front-line policing; determine what staffing levels are appropriate; find efficiencies; direct savings back to the front-line; and free up police officers for patrol.

It is estimated that possibly 60% of a front-line police officer's time is spent on paperwork. The average time to investigate a domestic call has quadrupled (or more) over the past twenty years. Investigative call times have increased considerably. Officers are encumbered by a variety of processes, regulations, legislation and reporting requirements.

In a September 2010 poll, when asked about administrative burden and response time, more than half of Ontarians agreed that police officers in Ontario are overburdened with administrative responsibilities. The majority believe that municipalities and the province should be lessening the administrative burden for Ontario's police officers.

The PAO is calling upon the Ontario government to form a working group, including all policing partners, to conduct a comprehensive review of:

- How legislation, court decisions, reporting, regulations, major crime reporting, court submissions, etc. have affected front-line policing;

- Examine if efficiencies can be found through the streamlining of processes and improvements in technology; and
- Determine how found efficiencies can enhance front-line policing.

CONCLUSION

The McGuinty government has moved forward with a number of important community safety and justice issues. Community safety depends on an effective judicial system coupled with adequate levels of professionally trained and resourced police personnel. Ultimately, it remains the responsibility of Ontario's provincial government and municipalities to ensure that Ontario's smallest towns and villages, as well as cities and provincial services are adequately funded and staffed.

Safe communities will attract business and growth. We need to ensure that communities in Ontario continue to be safe and to prosper. Adequate police staffing can only add to that sense of prosperity.

We would be pleased to meet and work with the Government at any time to look at other initiatives to meet our joint goal of improving community safety in Ontario.

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