

March 16, 2021

Special Committee on
Reforming the Police Act

Public Safety and Policing

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA) to share our ideas on policing and public safety with The Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act.

We currently live in a city where the opioid crisis, homelessness, and mental health concerns are at the forefront of what we see, not only in the media, but also in our day-to-day lives in Vancouver. A Global News article from February 11, 2021 reported that 1,716 deaths occurred in British Columbia in 2020 due to illicit drug use, which represents a 74% increase from 2019. In order to effectively address these matters, funding and support for areas such as mental health services, addiction services, outreach, and overdose prevention sites should be readily available to help those in our city who are most vulnerable.

Public safety is top of mind for the DVBIA and our member businesses. Our members regularly face issues such as threats, vandalism, aggression, and the overall sense of feeling unsafe. The types of incidents that our business owners currently struggle with often result in calls to 9-1-1 because of their violent nature. Business owners have told us that while simultaneously trying to carry out the regular day-to-day operations of their business, they are faced with managing behaviours of those suffering from drug addiction and mental illness, which is beyond the scope of what they are qualified to handle.

The police are already finding themselves in a place where they are understaffed and stretched to their limits. This is evident in the long wait times experienced by those phoning the non-emergency line or 9-1-1. A primary concern is that if police resources and funding are taken away, long wait times will get even longer, which will leave our business owners at a greater risk of becoming victims of violent offences.

Community-based policing is a crime prevention initiative in which there is a strong partnership between Community Policing Centres (CPCs) and the

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citizens they serve, including business and property owners. It is through these CPCs that crime prevention programs and projects are developed, allowing for a more proactive approach to dealing with crime. This approach allows the police to be more accurately informed, enabling them to more effectively deal with public safety concerns. A partnership approach with support service agencies and community policing would help address the social issues that our city is facing.

While police officers are not sufficiently trained to be mental health workers, neither are mental health workers trained to deal with circumstances where situations become violent. Therefore, the approach taken with funding has to be one of a partnership, where both are adequately funded and supported. There must be a balance between helping those in need and ensuring public safety. It is the responsibility of all levels of government and partnership agencies to not lose sight of one at the cost of the other.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our ideas in more detail with the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act. We wish to ensure that the review evaluates all elements of public safety, including provisions for funding mental health and addiction resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Gauthier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Charles Gauthier, MCP
President & CEO