



Op-Ed: Chronic Underfunding of Municipal Services Producing Cracks in Police Service Delivery

Communities across Ontario are increasingly at risk of experiencing cracks in police service delivery due to a chronic underfunding of public services. As President of the Police Association of Ontario (PAO) – the provincial representative organization for 47 local associations of uniform and civilian police personnel across the province – I am greatly concerned about the direct impact this continuous underfunding of police and social services has on the ability for our police personnel members to effectively do their jobs.

Using Statistics Canada data, the PAO has identified a direct connection between the underfunding of police and social services and a municipality's high Violent Crime Severity Index (VCSI) rate. Data from various communities throughout the province – such as Thunder Bay, Timmins, Cornwall, Brantford, North Bay and more – highlight how underfunding is affecting public safety. For instance, the City of Thunder Bay has an extremely high VCSI rate of 130 incidents per 100,000 when compared to the Canadian average of 75, but the municipality only invests 8% of its total budget to police services and 7% to social services – far below the provincial average municipal funding rates of 14% and 19% respectively. If they keep underfunding public services, the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS) will continue to be limited in their efforts to decrease the VCSI and improve police service employment conditions.

Police service employment conditions throughout the province are specifically of interest to the PAO. When uniform officers and police service employees are regularly being asked by their services to fill extra shifts and work overtime to make up for a lack of personnel, it contributes to high rates of burnout and individuals taking extended leaves of absence due to Operational Stress Injuries (OSIs). This creates a cyclical effect as staffing levels are then even further diminished with less police personnel available to take on that additional work.

In order to avoid the potential development of further cracks in the foundation of police service delivery, police service boards and municipalities across Ontario need to acknowledge that underfunding police and social services is not a sustainable public safety strategy, and need to recognize the value of protecting the health and wellness of those who protect their community. The PAO is committed to working with our member associations on local engagement strategies to move these discussions forward.

Bruce Chapman, President
Police Association of Ontario