

SPEAKING NOTES – CHIEF McFEE
Friday, July 24, 2020 – Noon – 1 pm (EDT)
Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security
Via Video Conference

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Good morning, Chair and committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to join with my colleagues representing the Ottawa Police Service and the Canadian Police Association to speak on a matter of great importance to the citizens of Edmonton and to all Canadians.

My name is Dale McFee and I am the Chief of the Edmonton Police Service where I work along side over 1900 sworn police officers and 900 civilians serving the nearly one million citizens of Edmonton. I have been involved in the justice system for over 30 years as both a sworn police officer and a deputy minister in

government, co- chaired the Federal Provincial Deputy Minister's committee and CCJS within Stats Can for over 4 years. I am a proud member of the Métis community and have been working to change the way we police for over 12 years.

To compliment Chief Sloly's remarks I am going to move from his suggestions and ideas around cultural change – which I support – and focus on operational changes to policing and the real crux of this matter: systemic change in policing and systemic change across the human service system that puts the people in need of the services at the centre of the needed change.

This is not the first time that the issue of systemic racism in policing has been the focus of discussion. The fact that we are gathered here once more demonstrates why we must move beyond conversation and into actionable, meaningful change that focusses on implementation and not more study. The facts are irrefutable: systemic racism is real and exists within and across all social institutions in Canada. This might make many feel uncomfortable and that is ok.

I am hopeful the committee will take away from the panels held yesterday and again today the realization that we can no longer look at systemic racism in policing as an isolated issue. As Justice Sinclair has commented, we need to move past the idea that being

part of a systemically racist system means you are a racist. As Chief Sloy also indicated, that is not necessarily the case. Systemic racism is seen across the broad system of all social structures and institutions. There are many examples of this such as:

The impacts of the residential schools are still felt in the Indigenous community and students continue to struggle in the classroom, many never completing their education or getting to post secondary where huge strides are made in reducing marginalization. This is systemic racism in action.

Further, emerging data show that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities in Canada

(as in other nations). Simply put: the social conditions and contexts within which people live determine such things as their access to quality health care, which itself can protect or expose them to certain illnesses or diseases. This is systemic racism in action.

Indigenous and other racialized communities are also over-represented in the child welfare system, for a host of complicated reasons, many of which represent systemic racism in action.

And yet, despite the evidence, we still can't seem to agree that systemic racism exists in this country.

Even in policing, we have leaders who cannot see the impact of systemic racism – even though our history

is marked by the role of police in enforcing the Indian Act and the discriminatory laws around and treatment of LGBTQ2S+ people, among others.

Being fortunate to speak on these matters and reform around the world for the past 12 years, this is – in my opinion – a time for leadership and courage as demonstrated through a commitment to change.

This is not just a political matter.

As Chief, I know that there is more work to be done within our organization and within the broader environment we operate in.

Nonetheless, I am encouraged, knowing that I lead a team of dedicated frontline officers, the overwhelming majority who – while having no part in building the institution of policing or writing the rules - put on the uniform every day. Each one committed to protecting and serving all citizens with compassion and professionalism.

It is as much for them as for those we serve, that we must hold individuals who hold racist or inappropriate views accountable and we all must commit to that.

But that, by itself, does not change the structure or the system, which, like other institutional structures and systems in this country, perpetuate racial inequality.

What began as protest against police brutality, has evolved into a broader conversation on community safety and well-being linked to broader social and economic issues and disparities.

So as a good friend of mine, Sheldon Kennedy, always says, “to know better is to do better!”

So now what?

Let’s start with Police Operations and here the change starts with leadership, who possess the requisite authority and influence to effect real change.

Where should leadership put their focus to give us the best results? I’d like to focus on three key areas, though there are many others.

First, our recruiting needs to show diversity in not just race, gender and sexual orientation/gender identity, but also diversity in thinking and lived experience.

Diverse recruiting changes culture and should never be taken lightly ...it is a primary driver of change. So, too, is taking a close look at promotion and retention processes to ensure that all levels reflect the diversity in thought and lived experience we are trying to achieve.

Second is responding to calls...our bread and butter.

There are two things that drive our calls for service.

- Social issues related to mental health, addictions, poverty and homelessness - which

account for between 80 and 92 % of calls for service, and

- addressing the serious offenders who are responsible for over 50% of recontact within the system.

These must be responded to in different ways; a failure to do so can actually artificially increase the crime rate and can have long-term, negative impacts on police-community relations and perceived police legitimacy.

Third; we need to ensure that Harassment, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion remain a priority for every police leader.

To demonstrate our commitment in this area, EPS has moved this responsibility directly under the Office of the Chief.

And finally, moving forward means looking at our organizational and operational policies, procedures and practices through a new lens.

This includes partnerships and dialogue with community members, community agencies, academia and other subject matter experts to ensure our policies and procedures are grounded in evidence and supported by research. This means we can do more of what works and put an end to what doesn't.

These are just some of the things we are doing at EPS and we could expand on several others but what if we could take it further and address the structure of policing?

Across Canada, cities and communities have developed strategies to address poverty, homelessness, housing, addictions and mental health.

In creating these plans, we have to ask:

- Who are we helping? Are they different people or the same people in most of these strategies? of course we know it is mostly the same people.
- How much money is being spent on the social safety net in our cities? Is it coordinated? How

can we improve our information sharing and pool our respective expertise to support that coordination? How many death inquests will it take to be bold in making these changes?

- How do we measure success? By how many people are taken into the system or how many they get out of the system? Are there minimum standards?

As I mentioned earlier, 80-92 per cent of calls to EPS are related to these key social issues.

So, wouldn't a coordinated strategy that incorporates both a law enforcement AND public health solution make sense? That combination alone gives you the

ability to engineer and reverse engineer in getting the response right.

Could that be the new structure? Are the social determinants of health not the same as the social determinants of justice?

By pulling together the areas that drive the work rather than basing the structure on historical silos, we can begin to address systemic change.

While the EPS is an organization of change, we recognize that the efforts of the EPS alone, nor the efforts of any singular police agency, will bring an end to the shameful legacy and ongoing nature of systemic racism in Canada.

Any effort to truly address systemic racism that is intended to effect real, meaningful and lasting change, must include criminal justice, healthcare, child welfare and educational institutions and our not for profits working together on joint outcomes to get people OUT OF THE SYSTEM or a chance at independence.

Policing is and will always be a vital public service necessary for the enforcement of the law and the maintenance of public safety. That means interactions between police and the public will continue but with the right local, provincial and national partnerships, we can find ways to turn those interactions into opportunities.

Opportunities to identify those individuals within our communities who would be better served by being directed not into the justice system for rehabilitation, but to the services they really need at the right time to address the ‘root causes’ of their victimization. Over the long term, we know that such approach increases effectiveness and reduces crime and cost.

We use the term “off-ramping”.

As frontline first responders, police officers are often the gateway to many community supports. The goal should always be to make that first contact meaningful and achieve the best outcome.

While the pain of systemic racism is most acutely felt by those in racialized communities, systemic racism is a threat to every Canadian and is a threat to our collective wellbeing. Our goal must be to create an environment where hate and its vile expression will not be tolerated.

In taking action – meaningful, collaborative action – to address systemic racism and to build a more equal and socially just system, we can create solutions to support the broader community of marginalized Canadians. As an organization, EPS is committed to helping support and/or lead in that effort.

Thank you.