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The RMA Formally Opposes the Creation of an Alberta Provincial Police Service

Nisku, AB, March 31, 2022 – The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) has submitted a report to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General opposing the creation of an Alberta Provincial Police Service (APPS). The Government of Alberta (GOA) has been pursuing an APPS based on a recommendation made by the Fair Deal Panel. The information shared by the GOA has left significant questions unanswered regarding how an APPS will increase policing service levels in rural areas, decrease overall policing costs, or increase local input into policing. For these reasons, RMA members endorsed resolution [4-22S: Continued Support for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Alberta](#) at the RMA 2022 Spring Convention opposing the proposed APPS model. Alberta Municipalities, the municipal association representing urban municipalities, also passed a motion in March opposing the creation on an APPS. As a result, municipalities in Alberta are unified in their opposition of the creation of an APPS.

The proposed model leaves significant gaps in demonstrating how it will increase service levels in rural areas. While the proposed model recommends a specific number of officers and support staff, it does not address how these resources will be distributed. Additionally, the costs presented in the report are a product of assumptions and estimates, with limited explanation of the methodology used. Regardless, the report identifies an annual increase in provincial costs due to the transition as the 30% of provincial policing costs covered by the federal government would be lost. In addition, the transition cost of \$366 million represents a significant unnecessary burden for Alberta taxpayers.

While the model does recognize the need for local input into policing and proposes the formation of local policing committees, it is unclear why a transition to an APPS is necessary to achieve this when there is the opportunity to work within the RCMP model to expand local input on policing priorities. The model also lacks detail on how local committees will be funded, where they will be located, and their powers and scope.

“The proposed provincial policing model does not address the RMA’s core priorities about levels of service, how costs will be covered, and local input into policing. While certain elements of the model are worth exploring, there is no evidence provided as to why these cannot be implemented within the existing RCMP arrangement. Based on the arguments provided by the province so far, there’s simply no evidence that a switch to a provincial police service will be worth the cost and disruption.” – Paul McLaughlin, RMA President.

A common theme of the proposed model and engagement process is a failure on the part of the GOA to demonstrate why an APPS is necessary to achieve improved policing outcomes and how it will do so. The Fair Deal Panel, Premier, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and other GOA decision-makers have argued that an APPS is necessary because the RCMP is headquartered in Ottawa and therefore not accountable to Albertans. However, this narrative is false. Provincial policing in Alberta is guided through a contract between the GOA and RCMP. The RCMP receives direction from the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General through a joint business plan, which the RCMP creates in consultation with the GOA and other provincial stakeholders to set provincial policing priorities. Additionally, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General establishes the budget for the provincial RCMP, which dictates staffing levels, equipment, and programs that the RCMP can deploy in Alberta.

“The RMA is concerned about misinformation regarding how the provincial RCMP set their priorities. The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has significant input on the priorities and level of service the RCMP provides through the joint business plan and the annual budget,” said McLaughlin. “Inserting politics into important decisions about the cost and quality of policing and public safety in the province is quite alarming. Spending millions of dollars to shift to an unproven, poorly explained model just for the sake of distancing the province from the federal government would be a major mistake.”

To the RMA’s knowledge, public consultation has not yet taken place, while detailed consultation has taken place with municipal leaders, resulting in widespread opposition to the proposed approach from municipal leaders. This lack of public engagement is a concern, as a 2021 Pollara Strategic Insights poll indicated that only 9% of Albertans believe the province needs to replace the RCMP with a provincial police force, demonstrating a general lack of support.

McLaughlin said, “The fact that the Government of Alberta has not conducted a public engagement on the proposed APPS model is a sign that they know it will not be supported by the public. The delivery of policing services matters to every Albertan, both urban and rural, and to not consult directly with the public is a major oversight on the part of the province and shows a willingness to put political goals above what Albertans believe is best for the safety of their communities.”

Rural municipalities and residents just want police services that are as responsive as possible and allow Albertans to feel safe in their homes. While the current model is not perfect, there has been a recent commitment on the part of the RCMP to prioritize rural safety, which has resulted in significant decreases in rural crime rates, especially among properties identified as repeat targets for property crime. Given these efforts on the part of the RCMP, the RMA believes that the best use of provincial resources is to continue to work to improve the current policing model while also adding much-needed resources to enhance rural social services and support adequate staffing in the justice system.

“At the end of the day, our priority is safe rural communities. We’ve been pleased with the work of the RCMP recently to address rural crime, so it’s concerning that instead of continuing to build on this momentum, the province is focused on pushing a new model lacking detail in nearly every area important to rural municipalities and residents,” said McLaughlin. “Our focus is on improving policing, improving social services, and improving the justice system. The province could make major progress in all three areas for the same cost and workload that would be required to develop an APPS.”