

Policing and Community Safety

Regardless of where in the province they live, all Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities. Like many services, policing in rural areas is accompanied by challenges related to large geographic areas and low population densities. Rural municipalities have a history of working effectively with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to support community safety, but challenges related to response time, police funding, and collaboration between police, the Government of Alberta, and municipal leaders is ongoing. As with any service, if municipalities are required to financially contribute to policing, this should result in improved service levels and greater local input.

What is the RMA's position on the importance of policing and community safety in rural municipalities?

- ◆ Safe communities are critical to attracting and retaining residents and businesses. In rural areas many properties are located in isolated areas far from neighbours or services, leaving them especially vulnerable to property crime.
- ◆ In recent years, crime rates in rural Alberta have increased significantly. For example, according to Statistics Canada, in 2023, rural crime rates in rural Alberta were 54% higher than in urban Alberta. In many rural areas, residents and businesses perceive crime as a crisis that significantly impacts their quality of life.
- ◆ Due to the unique challenges of policing rural Alberta, supporting safe rural communities requires collaboration among many groups, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Alberta Justice, Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services, municipalities, and local non-profit organizations.
- ◆ RMA is supportive of any measures that support enhanced safety in communities, but changes should only be made after careful consultation and engagement with municipalities.
- ◆ Enhanced police capacity is beneficial to rural communities, if supported by proper governance and local input.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to policing and community safety?

- ◆ As is the case with most services, providing a comparable level of policing service in rural areas to that in urban areas would cost significantly more and is likely impractical due to rural Alberta's large geographic areas and dispersed population.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta's Police Funding Model requires all rural municipalities and urban municipalities with a population of under 5,000 to contribute a portion of frontline policing costs.
- ◆ Alberta's Police Funding Model (PFM) formula is inequitable to rural municipalities. Rural municipalities contribute more than 80% of the total amount collected through the PFM despite hosting approximately 70% of the population..
- ◆ Alberta's Police Funding Model requires rural municipalities to contribute a significant portion to policing costs with no indication as to whether local services will improve, and no commitment to increased local input into policing.

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- ◆ While policing is critical to addressing rural crime, adequate investments in Crown prosecutors, Family and Community Support Services, and victim services is important to supporting safe rural communities.
- ◆ Provincial funding contributions to policing should focus on enhancing frontline capacity and service levels rather than incentivizing municipalities to pursue alternative policing arrangements.

What collaborative relationships are essential to developing safe rural communities?

- ◆ Rural municipalities are required to contribute to a significant portion of frontline policing costs through the Police Funding Model (PFM). The current PFM reflects a download in which contributing municipalities have no formal input into service levels or delivery, and there is no link between cost contributions and local service levels.
- ◆ The Police Funding Model should be redeveloped to reflect a partnership between the RCMP, Government of Alberta and municipalities that aligns with the significant fiscal contribution that municipalities make to local policing delivery.
- ◆ Police-based victim service units are important mechanisms for victims to have timely access to the support that they need when they need it. The collaboration between the RCMP and victim services units in the current service delivery model is efficient and effective.
- ◆ A centralized Provincial Police Advisory Board has the potential to undermine local community collaboration into policing. Accountability and transparency requirements for such a board should be clearly defined through regulation and regularly reported on by the Board.
- ◆ Changes to the *Police Act* to eliminate the legislated ability of small municipalities to form local police committees has weakened accountability of policing detachments to the community in which they operate.
- ◆ Based on a 2020 survey that the Alberta Police Interim Advisory Board (APIAB) distributed to all municipalities receiving RCMP policing services, collaboration between detachments and municipalities varies widely in both scope and frequency. For example, although over 80% of survey respondents indicated that their municipality received some form of regular reporting from their detachment, only 27% had a police oversight body such as a police committee dedicated to issues of policing and community safety.

How does the work of the RMA support safe rural communities?

- ◆ The RMA champions the rural municipal perspective on policing and crime through regular communication with a variety of crime-related organizations (e.g. Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Association of Community Peace Officers, Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association).
- ◆ The RMA participates on the Alberta Interim Police Advisory Board (AIPAB) along with ABmunis, the Alberta Association of Police Governance, and the Government of Alberta. The purpose of the APIAB is to develop the governance structure for a permanent Alberta Police Advisory Board consisting of municipal and community representatives from across Alberta, which will provide the government of Alberta and Royal Canadian Mounted Police with input into local priorities, concerns and ideas related to policing.
- ◆ The RMA has been appointed to serve on the Provincial Police Advisory Board. Although this board was legislated to begin in March 2025, there has been no information on next steps. RMA is of the understanding that the Alberta Interim Police Advisory Board will remain operational until the commencement of the Provincial Police Advisory Board.

POSITION STATEMENT

What current policing and community safety-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Independent Agency Police Service/Alberta Sheriffs Police Service

- ♦ Bill 49: the *Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act*, 2025 includes legislative amendments to the *Police Act* to enable the creation of the independent agency police service (IAPS). Municipalities will have the option of receiving policing from the IAPS instead of through the RCMP or other means outlined in the *Police Act*.
- ♦ The IAPS will operate as the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service (ASPS).
- ♦ Further information is required regarding how new policing entities will work with the RCMP at the local level in terms of collaboration, gathering community input, the development of Community Safety Plans, and implementing policing priorities.
- ♦ Municipalities should not be required to incur additional costs to support the creation and operation of an independent police agency.
- ♦ Bill 49 provides the Minister and Cabinet with significant power in forming and shaping two separate oversight bodies for the IAPS/ASPS – an oversight committee and board of directors. Although the intention is for the IAPS/ASPS to be an arms-length entity, RMA is concerned about whether this will be the reality.
- ♦ Governance and operational details will be determined through regulations that are not yet released, which means they will not have to go through the legislative process to be passed. Considering the effects that the information in the regulations will have, it is essential that adequate consultation with municipalities is conducted to ensure that they are reflective of community needs.
- ♦ The IAPS/ASPS may provide services to all or any part of Alberta, not just municipalities that request the service. RMA is concerned that the creation of a new policing agency may be intended to replace the RCMP.
- ♦ Throughout 2021-2022, the Government of Alberta engaged with residents regarding a potential transition to a provincial police service. The RMA supported members by creating reports and educational opportunities to help members understand the potential impacts. Many of the core recommendations made by RMA still remain relevant for the transition to the IAPS/ASPS: municipalities should be sufficiently engaged with before any serious changes are made to policing in the province, costs should not increase without corresponding increase in service levels, and local input should be enhanced.

Provincial Police Advisory Board

- ♦ RMA is concerned that changes to the *Police Act* to require the formation of a centralized Provincial Police Advisory Board will not allow rural and small urban municipalities to provide meaningful input into policing priorities.
- ♦ During engagement on the formation of a Provincial Police Advisory Board, RMA expressed concerns with whether a single, centralized Board could effectively represent the perspective of approximately 300 rural and small urban municipalities.
- ♦ The effectiveness of the Provincial Police Advisory Board will likely hinge on whether it is adequately resourced to meaningfully engage with and represent such a large number of diverse communities.
- ♦ Removing localized input into policing and replacing it with a centralized Provincial Police Advisory Board that makes decisions on behalf of 300 municipalities that receive policing under the Provincial

POSITION STATEMENT

Police Services Agreement is unacceptable to adequately recognize the unique policing needs within each community.

- ♦ The Provincial Police Advisory Board should serve a capacity-building function by providing advice and support to municipalities and local organizations as to how they can better engage with police at the local level.

Police Funding Model (PFM)

- ♦ The RMA has continued concerns with the Government of Alberta's decision to require rural municipalities to contribute to frontline policing costs since 2020. The PFM includes no requirement that local service levels will be enhanced or that local input into policing will increase.
- ♦ Requiring rural municipalities to contribute to frontline policing costs may have unintended consequences, including a reduction in other community safety initiatives such as community peace officers and other services.
- ♦ The current PFM is a download to municipalities, which needs to be replaced by an effective partnership.
- ♦ RMA is concerned about the PFM review engagement process, as it does not allow for an in-depth review of the impacts of the PFM on rural municipalities.
- ♦ RMA is participating in the PFM review process by participating in engagement sessions and interviews, formulating a submission to the Government of Alberta with specific recommendations, and equipping members with tools to create their own submissions.
- ♦ If the PFM continues, the formula must be adjusted to ensure that rural municipalities are not paying more for frontline policing without seeing any increase in service levels.
- ♦ Requiring municipalities to contribute to frontline policing with no consultation as to how the revenue collected will be used or how additional officers will be distributed across the province reflects a downloading of costs without increased municipal input.
- ♦ Equalized assessment is a poor measure for use in Alberta's PFM. Equalized assessment does not reflect a municipality's need for police services and is a volatile measure that will lead to inconsistent municipal costs each year.
- ♦ Any funds collected from municipalities under the PFM should be reinvested within the region from which they were collected.
- ♦ The *Municipal Government Act* should be amended to allow municipalities to designate the provincial policing levy as a requisition displayed separately on municipal property tax notices. This would support municipal transparency in demonstrating the portion of property taxes used to support provincial police services.
- ♦ Any increases to policing service levels as a result of PFM contributions have not aligned with the amount of PFM costs incurred by individual municipalities.
- ♦ There is currently no adequate record of how policing has been enhanced in rural areas as a result of the PFM. PFM reporting must be evidence-based to ensure that communities are receiving proper information about services in their community.
- ♦ The renewal of the PFM regulation must recognize and address the shortfalls of the current regulation by amending the formula to be more equitable to rural municipalities, both in terms of a link between cost and service level, and in terms of local input into policing.

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Community Peace Officers

- ♦ Community peace officers play an important role in many rural municipalities by enforcing municipal bylaws and some provincial laws.
- ♦ As community peace officers may encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations, it is critical that they have adequate training and resources to support a safe work environment.
- ♦ Community peace officers likely to encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations require direct and timely access to the Canadian Police Information Centre in order to gather basic information before approaching an unknown person or vehicle.

For more information visit: rmalberta.com

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