

Policing and Rural Crime

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 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 rural crime in rural municipalities?

- ◆ Safe communities are critical to attracting and retaining residents and businesses. In rural areas this is exacerbated as 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 2022, rural crime rates in rural Alberta were 33% 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.

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

- ◆ 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. As a result, rural municipalities will be responsible for covering more than 80% of the total costs incurred by municipalities affected by the model.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 incentivize municipalities to pursue alternative policing arrangements.

What collaborative relationships are essential to developing safe rural communities?

- ◆ Effective outreach and engagement with the community is a critical aspect of effective, modern policing. Due to limited police capacity and fewer formal community organizations in comparison to urban communities, prioritizing outreach and engagement can be a challenge for rural police services.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 Police Interim Advisory Board (APIAB) along with the 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.

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

Formation of Independent Police Agency

- ◆ In Spring 2024, Bill 11: the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 received royal assent. Bill 11 will update current policing legislation to establish a new policing organization that would work alongside other police services in the province. According to the Government of Alberta, the goal of this police organization is to support the RCMP, municipal police services, and First Nations police services in focusing their time on core operations and frontline duties.
- ◆ 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.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Municipalities should not be required to incur additional costs to support the creation and operation of an independent police agency.
- ◆ RMA is concerned that the creation of a new policing agency may be intended to replace the RCMP.

Provincial Police Force

- ◆ The creation of a provincial police force should not take place unless a detailed feasibility study proves that such an approach will reduce provincial and municipal policing costs and enhance service levels across the province.
- ◆ Municipalities should not be required to incur additional costs to support the creation and operation of a provincial police force.
- ◆ In late 2021, the Government of Alberta released three reports outlining a potential transition to a provincial police service. The RMA supports members by creating reports and educational opportunities to help members understand the potential impacts.
- ◆ In 2022, the Government of Alberta released an additional implementation report that suggests each detachment should have a minimum of 10 officers. However, it is unclear how this number was arrived at, if it is necessary for all detachments, or if it is sustainable.
- ◆ RMA is concerned about how hiring and training new officers would work under a provincial police service, especially given the recent decision by the City of Surrey to revert back to the RCMP after initiating an independent police service.

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 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.
- ◆ 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.

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.



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