

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Systemic Racism in Police Services in Canada

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About Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) was founded in 1986 by Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and community leaders in the City of Toronto. NCFST's service model was developed through four days of ceremony and directs the development of a multi-service Indigenous organization working to create health, wellness and prosperity for Indigenous children and families in Toronto. In 2004 NCFST received its mandate as a legislated Children's Aid Society. Today it is the largest multi-service urban Indigenous agency with the child welfare mandate in Canada. NCFST provides a broad range of services including: daycare; Aboriginal Head Start; EarlyON Centres; day camps; summer camps; children's mental health; educational and employment training; youth services; clinical services; violence against women; pre and post-natal supports; anti-human trafficking; residential services (including transitional housing for youth and a clinical healing lodge for Indigenous mothers); child and family well-being (Indigenous child welfare); and a host of cultural services delivered face-to-face and virtually. Most relevant to this committee, NCFST has a demonstrated history of working collaboratively with the Toronto Police Services, and delivers critical mental health and victim services for Indigenous peoples in Toronto.

About Dr. Jeffrey Schiffer

Dr. Jeffrey Schiffer has Métis and German ancestry, and was born and raised in unceded Coast Salish territory- in what is today Vancouver, British Columbia. He holds a BA in anthropology from the University of British Columbia, and an MA and PhD in anthropology and education from Columbia University. Dr. Schiffer has conducted community-based research and program development with Indigenous communities in Canada and Central America. His dissertation focused on decolonizing and indigenizing Aboriginal child welfare in diverse urban spaces. Over the past 15 years Dr. Schiffer has held positions at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, the Justice Institute of British Columbia, and the City of Toronto. Throughout this time he has also taught alongside his mother, Shirley Turcotte, in the Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy Program, and the Indigenous Tools for Living training. Dr. Schiffer is currently the Executive Director at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. He also serves on a number of boards and committees including: the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council; the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Committee (co-chair); the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (vice president); and the Child Welfare League of Canada.

Race, Racism and Structural Racism

The meaning of the word "race" has changed over time and first appeared in the early 16th century to distinguish nation-states. The growth of western science in the 19th century saw a new classification of peoples based on physical characteristics (phenotypes). Biological characteristics were soon extended to include social and cultural ones, and a hierarchy of races emerged within the pseudoscience of social Darwinism. The notion that some races are more advanced than others was deeply embedded in colonization and the creation of Canada's government and major institutions. 19th century criminologists Lombroso and Ferrero, for example, argued that criminals were primitive, morally inferior throwbacks to earlier stages of

evolution. Black and Indigenous peoples were seen as inferior races prone to the savagery represented by criminal behaviour and non-Christian spiritual and ceremonial practice.

Advances in scientific knowledge in the first half of the 20th century debunked any biological notion of race. As Elizabeth Comack notes in *Racialized Policing*, race nonetheless became part of a common understanding "as both a way of demarcating groups of people on the basis of features such as skin colour, culture, religion, and language, and a way of indicating corresponding ways of acting on these distinctions." This led to the racialization of Indigenous and Black peoples, and deeply impacted the institutions that emerged to educate, missionize and police these peoples. Racism involves more than negative beliefs and attitudes- it has a systemic basis. Racist discourse not only has its basis in material conditions but is also supported by and reinforces institutional and social practices in society that privilege certain racialized groups over others.

We have a great deal of work to do nationally in regard to systemic racism. The first step of acknowledging the problem is now complete. As RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki has stated: "Systemic racism is part of every institution including the RCMP, and historically as well as today, the force has not always treated racialized and Indigenous people fairly." It is now incumbent upon us to find evidence-based, fiscally responsible, community driven solutions to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous and racialized peoples across Canada.

[The Role of Policing on Colonization: Past and Present](#)

Policing in Canada emerged, in part, as a mechanism to enforce and expand colonization. Specifically, the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) occupied a central role in managing and containing the Indigenous population as white settlement advanced. They played a central role in forcibly relocating Indigenous peoples to reserve lands established by the Crown, and in removing Indigenous children from their families to be placed in residential schools. Colonialism has not disappeared, but taken on new forms in contemporary times. Since the creation of the NWMP in 1873 various iterations of police services at the national, provincial and municipal level, have been utilized by the Canadian state to control, pacify and oppress Indigenous peoples.

Today more than 30% of inmates in Canadian prisons are Indigenous, even though Indigenous peoples make up some 6% of the country's population. Since April 2010, the Indigenous population in prisons has grown by nearly 44%, whereas the non-Indigenous incarcerated population has declined over the same period by 13.7%. And although there are far fewer female prisoners, Indigenous women currently represent 42% of the female prison population. This stark overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples within the correctional system is accompanied by troubling statistics of police violence, sexual assault, and killings of Indigenous peoples. While police services across Canada struggle to implement change, research is revealing that reducing these statistics may require a variety of approaches that transfer some of the work being done by police services to community-based organizations with demonstrated histories of success in these same services.

The Impossible Task of Policing

Many community leaders, academics and other experts have pointed out that we now rely on police services to do much more than individual officers are trained for. The recent deaths of Chantel Moore and Regis Korchinski-Paquet, to name just two examples, shed light on the inability of police officers to deescalate individuals dealing with mental health crisis. The reality for Indigenous peoples is that just seeing a uniformed officer impacts an interaction because of the intergenerational relationship between Indigenous peoples and law enforcement. There is no amount of training that can eliminate the way history shapes any interaction between Indigenous peoples and police before it has even begun. Communities have attempted to address this challenge through the development of Indigenous police services and community safety officer programs in reserve communities. There are also a few examples of communities attempting to address Indigenous community safety in urban spaces through the development of programs like the Bear Clan Patrol in Winnipeg. These programs collectively demonstrate that different outcomes are possible when Indigenous communities are enabled to create and implement programs that address community safety, mental health and victim services in evidence-based and culturally relevant ways. Evidence from across Canada suggests that police forces are incapable of eliminating systemic racism themselves. Instead they need to work with Indigenous and racialized peoples on multiple fronts to: provide training to their own officers; diversify their staffing; build strong community relationships; and transfer targeted responsibilities (along with the necessary funding) to community-led organizations with demonstrated histories of success in delivering the services in question.

What is Being Done and Why it Doesn't Work

When racism and discrimination is confirmed within a police service, government-sponsored inquiries and commissions often recommend increasing diversity in training and recruitment. Striving for a more proportionate and representative organization is a good start, but representation alone does not fundamentally challenge the racial hierarchies in the system. In an article published in *The Hill* on June 7th, 2020, Dr. Peter Coleman sheds light on the effectiveness of these responses. "In a large [study](#) assessing data from 708 private sector establishments between 1971 to 2002," Coleman writes, "researchers found that of the three most common approaches to addressing bias and discrimination within institutions (training, promoting inclusion and establishing institutional responsibility), efforts to mitigate discrimination through diversity trainings were found to be the least effective." The evidence is telling us that education and training are not having an impact on the beliefs, attitudes and actions of individual police officers. The research is also telling us that systemic racism in policing is driven by a constellation of individual, group, institutional and societal elements. Police services struggle to make meaningful change because many elements of the ecology required to achieve the changes they purport to seek lie outside of their organizations and jurisdictions. Indeed the same complexity and challenge is common to other complex institutions with long histories of discrimination, such as mainstream child welfare. Nonetheless, about \$8 billion dollars is spent annually on diversity training in the U.S. to virtually no avail.

So what does work? Research out of the U.S. suggests that meaningful change may require destabilization through major shocks. Precisely the scenario we find ourselves in today with the cumulative shock of international uprisings against systemic racism and violence within the context of a global pandemic. If the opportunity for change is presently upon us, what levers do we need to pull to be the change we want to see? Research suggests that problems of such complexity needs to be addressed by a wide variety of actions. As Coleman puts it, “training only works when combined with other structural initiatives.” Some of these other initiatives, he argues, requires us to build-up from what is already working locally, while at the same time breaking down the main drivers of the problem.

Attending to the culture of policing and the language and actions of officers addresses only part of the fundamental problem. The structure and organization of police work also needs to be addressed. We also need to take a hard look at police services with considerations for what type of work they do well and where they tend to stumble. Evidence from across Canada tells us that police struggle to de-escalate people of colour struggling with mental health, substance abuse, poverty, complex trauma, and many of the other impacts that are themselves the direct result of colonization and intergenerational problematic relationships between police and Indigenous peoples. How do we live better together as diverse Canadians, and what is the role of law enforcement in supporting equity and managing conflict in 21st century Canada? What tools and approaches from the past are still relevant today? What new tools and approaches need to be added?

[Reframing the Problem: Community-Led Innovations and Solutions](#)

Police have occupied a central role in the reproduction of order, policing the conflict and abuses that arise from the particular forms of poverty and social exclusion that our society has created. Re-framing the problem and re-envisioning the strategies for resolving it open up new possibilities for the role of the police in the form of community mobilization. Community mobilization involves working in close partnership with community-led organizations and social service agencies engaged in a wide variety of service areas related to community safety, mental health, victim services and other areas. Rather than reproducing the status quo, police services have a unique and finite opportunity to participate in the fashioning of a new form of social order; one not founded on race, racism and racialized policing. The current shock within our system resulting from COVID-19 and coordinated international protests against police violence and structural racism provides an opportunity we cannot let slip through our fingers. We do not need more commissions, inquiries or research. Research has well documented the complexity of the problem as well as the possibilities for resolution. The time for actioning change is now. This action should begin with reframing the problem. We cannot expect police services born out of a colonial era steeped in ideologies of racial hierarchies to be equipped to identify and resolve structural racism alone. But we can expect them to understand that some change is beyond them, and that making the changes needed will require devolving services and resources to community organizations that will work in partnership with police services to achieve the changes needed.

Recommendations

1. That the Federal Government work with the provinces and territories, municipalities and Indigenous communities to reallocate funding and/or service responsibilities related to mental health response and victim services to Indigenous organizations.
2. That specific funding be allocated to mental health response and victim services for Indigenous peoples. The need is particularly pressing urban municipalities, like Toronto, that are seeing rapid growth of the Indigenous community.
3. That the Federal Government create an Indigenous-led working group to better examine the service needs related to mental health and victim services of rapidly growing urban Indigenous communities.