

REPORT TO THE POLICE SERVICE BOARD



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**Canadian Association
of Police Governance
– Annual Conference
- Summary**

Type of Report: Public

Background

The Canadian Association of Police Governance (CAPG) held its 35th Annual Conference from August 9-11 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Board was represented by six members, and members of the DRPS and a representative from the Durham Regional Police Association were also in attendance.

The CAPG is a national organization dedicated to excellence in police governance in Canada, and serves its members through education, supporting and sharing research and best practices, and through collaboration with other police services sector stakeholders across the nation. The CAPG represents 80% of municipal police boards and commissions across Canada.

Summary of Conference Sessions

The theme of this year's conference was "Where Governance Meets Public Safety". Plenary sessions included presentations from elected officials, Chiefs of Police and Board members, academics, and legal professionals from across the country. The topics covered included police culture, policing the unhoused, communication and engagement, discipline, recruitment, and equity and inclusion. DRPS CAO Stan MacLellan presented on the evaluation of a member wellness program, and participated on a panel discussing evidence-based policing. The salient points and thematic areas explored during the conference are summarized below.

Police Culture

- The presenters emphasized that Boards have a prominent role in fostering organizational culture. While policing as a sector has dominant characteristics that span across the profession, each police organization is a separate workplace and Boards produce a significant impact on the quality of the work environment. Boards were encouraged to work with their Chiefs of Police, who are responsible for administration and operations, and to pursue incremental change. Data is especially important in this regard, and should be relied upon in designing the programs and responses to workplace issues, and identifying metrics to assess progress. The implementation of outcome metrics was as opposed to process metrics was promoted (for example, the number of members who perceive that the promotions system is fair is a better measure than the number of members trained in specific area). It was also suggested that Board

members should model the behaviours they wish police members to emulate, in their interactions with the community, the police and one another.

Police Officer Recruitment

- The primary message conveyed by the panelists was that interest as a career as a police officer has decreased in recent years. The presenters identified a number of reasons for this development: more negative perceptions of the police by the public, especially among younger people; the negative tone associated with policing in academic institutions and the portrayal of police in social media; and a generally more competitive labour market. It was also noted that a culture of “hyper-masculinity” still pervades policing culture to a certain extent, which discourages women and racialized individuals from pursuing policing as a profession. In order to counter these trends, police organizations should strive to strengthen their reputation and image through community engagement and education efforts, and ensure that positive interactions occur with young people, for example, through school resource officer programs. The assessment of potential candidates should also be reexamined, in particular any psychological evaluations that exclude candidates who may have experienced certain stresses and generational trauma. One Police Service explained a cadet program that has been introduced allowing high potential future police officers to serve on a one-year contract prior to being hired as an officer.

Board Communication

- Panelists stated that Boards should enhance their efforts to communicate with and engage the community to strengthen public trust and uphold police legitimacy. Care should be exercised however, as social media companies exploit content that is divisive, as this type of content attracts more attention and therefore more revenue for these companies. Boards and Services were encouraged to participate in countering a negative narrative that often does not accurately portray events or issues, and to promote the positive contributions of the police in Canada and the accountability mechanisms and processes that exist. Boards should not merely be extensions of the voice of their respective Police Service, or their “cheerleader”, but should have a distinct objective that is focused on its oversight and governance responsibilities for policing in the community.

Member Wellness Program Evaluation – Durham Regional Police Service

- DRPS CAO MacLellan and Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli provided an in-depth review of the Healthy Apples program and the recent evaluation of the program. It was noted that the DRPS has prioritized member health and that 16 wellness programs are in place, with 80% of members participating in at least one. While mental health is an important focus, the social and physical health of employees remains important in order for the organization to operate effectively and efficiently. Recognizing that more than 80% of police budgets are dedicated to member salaries and benefits, investing in member health is critical to success as healthy members perform more optimally, foster a positive organizational

culture, and have lower rates of absenteeism. The Healthy Apples program involves members committing to a medical and clinical assessment once per year, and then receiving a \$250 reimbursement for a health related activity or program that the member has paid for (such as gym membership). The evaluation involved semi-structured interviews with 68 members, and concluded that the program is effective at supporting member health. For example, members who participate use approximately 50% less leave than members who do not participate. The benefits of participation, including the requirement for a medical and clinical assessment, encourages a culture of individual awareness and support, so that members are more likely to be accountable for their own health. Areas of administration of the program could be improved to streamline accessibility, such as allowing members to perform the assessments while at work. The reimbursement amount was also reduced from \$300 which may be perceived as the organization attributing less importance to the program, and it was suggested that this be reversed. Adjustments to the fitness assessment to encourage higher levels of participation and strengthening communication about the program's goals and benefits was also recommended.

Peel Regional Police – Transforming to Represent a Diverse Community

- The Chair of the Board, the Executive Director and the Chief of Police addressed the recent changes at the Peel Regional Police Service that have resulted in a significant shift in how policing is delivered in the community. In 2019, the Service exhibited a “warrior” mentality, with a focus primarily on enforcement, resulting in strained relationships with the community, especially marginalized groups, and an erosion of trust in the police. A full turnover on the Board led to a new approach, beginning with hiring a new Chief of Police committed to transforming the Service from a “warrior” to a “guardian” mindset, based on the premise that public policing must have public input, requiring significant investments in community relationships. The Board and the Service began a process of public outreach to improve relations, with the involvement of the Human Rights Commission, and a focus on community safety and wellbeing. Three principles were embraced and served as the foundation for the Strategic Plan: progressive, innovative and inclusive, leading to four pillars in the Plan – community engagement and partnerships; new technology; evidence-based decision-making and recruitment, training and wellness. The representatives from Peel expressed that the process was challenging, but has resulted in major improvements to policing and community trust. The Service recently reported a 30% reduction in use of force incidents and a 58% reduction in injuries to members.

Evidence-Based Policing

- Representatives of the Barrie Police Service and the DRPS CAO Stan MacLellan explained their organizations' increasing commitment to and application of evidence-based decision-making. Data is the foundation for embracing this principle, and accepting that the organization is in a constant state of learning and change. This model takes time and investment, and requires a commitment

to posing questions such as what research and data exist to support requests for additional resources. Community expectations and needs are growing, not only in relation to policing, and it is becoming increasingly important for police organizations to demonstrate the effect of their investments and resource deployments on community safety.

De-policing

- The researcher explained his study which concluded that officers are avoiding informal, proactive contact with members of the public as a form of risk aversion. Diminishing public perceptions of the police have caused officers to reduce their number of self-initiated calls for service, with the sub-culture of policing reinforcing a mentality of de-policing. The researcher, a former police officer in Ottawa, concluded that 72% of officers in the Canadian and American study are engaging in de-policing as a way to lower occupational risk. This practice presents a significant risk to relationship building, gathering intelligence and information, and building community trust.

Policing the Unhoused

- The panelists addressed the approach in Alberta and Moncton to address homeless encampments. The Chief of the Edmonton Police Service emphasized the lack of safety at encampments, and asserted that doing nothing represents a major disservice to the most vulnerable. He noted that many encampments are operated by gangs, who impose a tax for access to services such as water, and the prevalence of human and drug trafficking in encampments. The City of Edmonton has made support services for addiction and mental health to those in encampments a priority, and a recent initiative resulted in a 70% acceptance rate. The Deputy Premier of Alberta emphasized that addiction is an illness that requires medical treatment, and he asserted the importance of taking a holistic approach to wellness that involves a comprehensive set of services along a continuum, from detox to treatment and assistance with housing and employment. The representative from Moncton articulated similar points – that enforcement is not the exclusive response but the lack of safety in the camps necessitates police involvement. It was also pointed out that competition among non-profit groups involved in homelessness can be detrimental to a united response, and that relationships must be nurtured to ensure that services and outreach are coordinated. All participants emphasized that ideology and the political rhetoric that characterizes the debate about homelessness and encampments impedes meaningful change.



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