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A Few Bad Apples?

“We don’t want our moral authority undermined to the point that we have no respect at all.” Stan Tataryn, former Winnipeg Police Service, *To Serve and Be Protected*. Let’s be clear. The police are human beings and are no more or less moral than anyone else. What they do have is legal authority. Policing was created by legislation in order to enforce other laws. In democracies, laws are created by elected officials. Canadian politicians have created some truly atrocious laws. The Indian Act comes to mind. Viola Desmond is on our \$10 bill because anti-Black racism was legal in Canada. Homophobia was legal. We have Pride celebrations because banning homosexuality was struck down. However, while these were the laws of this land, the police enforced them. At times, quite brutally.

Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted to give everyone equal protection under the law. In practice though, we have a long way to go. Current legislation, policies and practices determines the how, when and on whom laws are enforced. In Manitoba, we know who is policed more because we know who is incarcerated; roughly 75% are Indigenous while only 15% of the total population. We are forced to estimate the true impact on racialized communities because the Winnipeg Police Service does not track race based data while Manitoba Justice only tracks Indigenous versus non-Indigenous.

In Winnipeg, we also know where the majority of reported crime takes place. It is in the inner-city which makes up the majority of Winnipeg Centre, the federal riding with the third highest rate of child poverty across Canada (42%). Just north is Winnipeg North where 32% of children live in poverty. These two ridings are also where the majority of Indigenous Winnipeggers live. The evidence linking poverty to crime has been made abundantly clear over decades of research. Our response though has not been to get ‘tough’ and solve poverty. Instead we spend well over \$300 million on the Winnipeg Police Service and over \$200 million to incarcerate those arrested every year, year after year. Court costs etc... not included. And our crime rates keep rising.

It is troubling that Member of Parliament for Winnipeg North, Kevin Lamoureux, is not just promoting a flawed petition but also used the tired ‘a few bad apples’ to dismiss concerns over the state of policing by members of his own riding as well as from across Canada. We encourage Mr. Lamoureux to finish the actual adage: A few bad apples spoil the bunch. In Winnipeg, we simply have seen too many ‘bad apples’. Just recently there was the ridiculously petty response from some WPS members to the Tallest Poppy supporting Winnipeg Police Cause Harm. They did not just advocate a boycott which is their legal right but went on to suggest they call in orders and not show up to pay. There was WPS member Rejeanne Caron tweeting that anyone calling for a cut

to police funding should be blocked from calling 911. There was yet another filmed incident with Patrol Sargent Kevin Smith who has a reported long history of becoming abusive and threatening. And then there is the recent news that former WPS Justin Holz has gained full parole after serving 2.5 years for killing Cody Severight. After having been drinking with fellow off-duty members of the WPS. His fellow on duty police officers then delayed the breathalyzer by 3 or 4 hours. Where are the good apples when these things happen?

We do not have adequate accountability measures. We were told that the above incidents were dealt with internally. Members of the public were threatened and/or harmed. Why doesn't the public know the results? We do know that the vast majority of complaints made to the Law Enforcement Review Agency are dismissed out of hand and all but a few actually reach a conclusion. We also know that even when the Independent Investigations Unit recommends charges, Crown Prosecutions has not proceeded citing 'improbability of conviction'. This is the same Crown Prosecutions that routinely holds 60 to 70% of accused in jail prior to trial and sentencing undermining their presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Does that sound like accountability to you?

The petition is flawed because it attempts to align police, who not only have the power to destroy lives by choosing who to charge for what, but to actually take lives, with those of the marginalized communities that the Charter is meant to protect. Currently police officers have the same protections as everyone else under the Criminal Code. By advocating that as a body they should receive the same status both undermines and delegitimizes the very real oppression faced by the truly marginalized. It also implies that the police would be granted additional protections and enforcement measures to address the people who criticize them. To imply that those calling for police accountability will be responsible for more police violence should be seen for what it is, a threat. This is not acceptable.

We all know there are dedicated, humane and principled people in policing. And then there are those who are not. We also know that the police have been tasked, by default, to address the failures of an inadequately funded social safety net. Now is the time to go beyond blame. For us all to take an honest look at what is not working, the harm done by these failures and commit to doing better. No matter the financial cost as that pales in comparison to the loss of human lives and the cost to our collective humanity.

Michael Redhead Champagne and Kate Kehler
Police Accountability Coalition (PAC) Co-chairs
PAC is a coalition of over 100 community based organizations calling for justice reform from all stakeholders and levels of government.