

MISSING
WOMEN
COMMISSION OF
INQUIRY

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Public Policy Forum 5:
Enhancing Police Accountability

Tuesday, May 8, 1:30 p.m. – 4 p.m.
Wosk Centre for Dialogue – Room 420
580 West Hastings Street, Vancouver

Enhancing Police Accountability

Session Date, Time and Location:

Monday, May 8, 1:30 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Wosk Centre for Dialogue – Room 420

580 West Hastings Street, Vancouver

Public concerns regarding the missing women investigations.

The current structure of policing in the Lower Mainland and throughout the province raises concerns over whether there is effective oversight of the various police departments and the RCMP operating in its municipal and provincial capacity. In the context of the Missing Women Inquiry, accountability issues have arisen concerning the low levels of priority and resourcing assigned to the missing women and Pickton investigations.

These issues raise questions about the relationship between the police, government and the public.

Public concerns regarding the missing women investigations differ from the public concerns that traditionally lead to public inquiries, such as the excessive use of force. Rather than there being concerns about inappropriate government influence or a threat of police becoming “a law unto themselves,” there was an apprehension of a police failure to act abetted by either indifference or bias. These public concerns raise questions about the systems for ensuring police accountability and transparency in police and government decision-making.

Policy forum five focuses on police accountability measures as one important aspect of the structure and organization of

policing in BC that shapes the ability of the police to prepare for and respond to serial crimes. These issues raise questions about the relationship between the police, government and the public.

Police accountability systems must strike a delicate balance between the independence and discretion that police have under the law and that is critical to their ability to operate with the need for the police to be accountable for the way in which they exercise their powers. Currently, there are numerous mechanisms for police oversight:

- ▶ Formal inquiries and inquests;
- ▶ Internal reviews of police accountability;
- ▶ Province-wide task forces;
- ▶ Municipal, provincial and federal governments deciding on police force budgets;
- ▶ Internal investigations departments; and
- ▶ Activities of specialized police-related tribunals (civilian and police complaints tribunals, police services boards, internal police disciplinary panels).

Three main sets of issues or concerns related to police accountability systems arise in the context of the Commission's mandate. These are:

1. Inadequate community input into policing priorities;
2. Inadequate provincial standardization of missing persons and major crime investigations; and
3. Limited approaches to police discipline.

People want and need to understand what the police are doing and why. We currently have multiple and overlapping oversight systems of police. Reform may be required to enhance

People want and need to understand what the police are doing and why.

Community input is important but the idea of community is not a straightforward one in today's complex society, particularly in urban areas.

Accountability mechanisms may have to be adapted to accommodate the multi-faceted nature of community.

accountable and transparent police decision-making and to promote accountable and transparent government decision-making about policing. Existing formal accountability mechanisms may not be nimble enough to meet today's needs. For example, police discipline processes tend to be complex, highly adversarial and time-consuming. Innovative approaches to police discipline based on early intervention and education-based models may be more responsive to community needs.

Community input is important but the idea of community is not a straightforward one in today's complex society, particularly in urban areas. Our sense of community may reside foremost within the neighbourhood we reside in or it may be much broader than the city limits. For First Nations people, as well as some ethnic minorities, a sense of community is likely to exist on ethno-cultural lines as well. Accountability mechanisms may have to be adapted to accommodate the multi-faceted nature of community.

These issues are further complicated by the fact that federal, municipal and provincial police legislation, accountability standards, and processes are different. These diverse accountability processes and the lack of a clear accountability process for joint police operations have the potential to obscure lines of police accountability to the public.

These are some of the questions and issues to be addressed during the dialogue at this policy forum:

- ▶ Are changes required with respect to the composition, mandate and/or operations of police boards? Is there a need for a regional police board?
- ▶ What additional mechanisms, if any, are required to enhance the accountability and transparency of police and government decision-making regarding policing?

- ▶ Should provincial policing authorities be more proactive in setting provincial policing standards and evaluating their implementation by various policing agencies? If so, what are the priorities in this regard in the context of the Commission's mandate? How should these functions be carried out?
- ▶ Are independent reviews or audits of police services required in order to ascertain the systemic barriers to the investigation of cases of missing and murdered women and to the effective protection of vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, how should these be carried out?
- ▶ What steps should be taken to measure and evaluate progress and new approaches and programs related to the investigation of missing women and suspected multiple homicides?
- ▶ Are current processes for police discipline meeting community needs? Should alternative, less formal disciplinary processes be implemented? If so, what alternative approaches would work in BC?

Additional Information

For more information on this topic, please review the discussion paper: *Issues Related to the Structure and Organization of Policing Arising from the Missing Women Investigations*. You can download it here:

<http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/>.