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**VIA EMAIL**

Dear Commissioners:

**Re: Phase 2 submissions**

Please accept these submissions on behalf of the National Police Federation (“NPF”) in respect of the following issues addressed by the Commission during Phase 2: (a) rural policing; (b) support for victims and survivors; and (c) first responder wellness.

**A. Policing in a Rural Context**

1. The Commission must consider how the rural context of the perpetrator’s actions impacted both a proactive and reactive police response. The evidence before the Commission highlights the difficulties our Members faced leading up to the mass casualty of building trust, community relationships, and situational knowledge in a vast rural area. These challenges arose due to systemic issues, including staffing levels, rural “gun culture”, and rural attitudes regarding intimate-partner/gender-based violence. Members also faced significant difficulties during the mass casualty itself, due to under-resourcing and the vast geographical area that the perpetrator traveled during his rampage.
2. Rural police services are faced with an overall higher crime rate, and significantly higher rates of violent crime.<sup>1</sup> Rural residents are at a higher risk of being murdered, assaulted, and victimized by firearms than urban residents,<sup>2</sup> and rural women face a higher risk of domestic violence.<sup>3</sup> Policing in rural areas, where firearm ownership is common, and where illegal firearms are not uncommon,<sup>4</sup> can be stressful due to the potential for officers to be the targets of gun violence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Ruddell and C. O’Connor, “What do the Rural Folks Think? Perceptions of Police Performance” (“What do the Rural Folks Think?”), *Policing*, 16:1, 2021, COMM0059288, Exhibit P-003178, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> K. Foster, “Crime Prevention & Community Safety in Rural Communities” (“Crime Prevention”), April 2022, COMM0053824, Exhibit P-002633, pp. 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> D. Doherty and J. Hornosty, “Exploring the Links: Firearms, Family Violence and Animal Abuse in Rural Communities: Final Research Report to The Canada Firearms Centre, RCMP, Public Safety Canada” (“Exploring the Links”), May 2008, COMM0059735, Exhibit P-003682, pp. viii and 47.

<sup>5</sup> R. Ricciardelli, “Risk It Out, Risk It Out’: Occupational and Organizational Stresses in Rural Policing” (“Risk It Out, Risk It Out”), *Police Quarterly*, 2018, COMM0059287, Exhibit P-002641, p. 425-427.

3. Rural police services typically consist of relatively small teams, often based out of one station or detachment, that are responsible for vast, sparsely populated areas. Despite this, rural areas receive fewer resources,<sup>6</sup> and are often understaffed. The Commission has heard evidence that RCMP detachments, including Bible Hill, regularly operated at minimum complement.<sup>7</sup> Understaffing of rural police services can present significant challenges when a rapid response is required to a distant location, or to multiple locations. Lower population density and greater distance between homes and communities in rural areas mean police are not proximal to all areas in their jurisdiction.
4. Existing staffing levels do not allow officers to patrol and respond to calls for service with a partner, and most commonly general duty Members travel alone in their vehicles, including during the mass casualty. Leaving Members to patrol and respond to calls alone poses inherent risks to both officer and public safety.
5. Compounding the impact of understaffing, rural officers are often unable to proactively patrol their jurisdictions due to a “draining amount” of administrative, non-investigative paperwork they are required to complete.<sup>8</sup> Members are also often diverted from other policing duties by fulfilling roles which may not be most appropriately filled by police officers. For example, time-consuming *Mental Health Act*-related calls were the highest workload driver for Members in both Cumberland and Colchester Districts in 2019.<sup>9</sup>
6. Research has “consistently shown the importance of local relationships and situated knowledge in establishing trust and legitimacy in rural areas.”<sup>10</sup> Local knowledge and community relationships can be highly valuable in obtaining information during serious incidents, and can assist officers to identify issues before they escalate.<sup>11</sup> However, understaffing, less than 24-hour/day policing coverage, and the closure of rural detachments result in inadequate policing resources to meet community expectations, reduce police response times to calls for service, erode situated local knowledge, and impede the building of community relationships with, and trust in, police through proactive community policing.
7. Studies have shown that crime may be significantly underreported in rural areas, and that rural residents are often reluctant to involve police, particularly regarding intimate-partner/gender-based violence.<sup>12</sup> This underreporting may be due in part to some of the impacts of under-resourcing, such as the limited ability of understaffed police services

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<sup>6</sup> A. Souhami, “A Systematic Review of the Research on Rural Policing” (“Systematic Review”), May 2022, COMM0058282, Exhibit P-002634, pp. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Testimony of Sgt. Andy O’Brien, May 31, 2022, COMM0058858, p. 9, line 21 to p. 10, line 12.

<sup>8</sup> Testimony of Dr. Ricciardelli, Roundtable: Rural Communities, Policing and Crime, COMM0059605, pp. 111-112; Testimony of S/Sgt. Addie MacCallum, June 8, 2022, COMM0058948, pp. 220-221, lines 26-28 and 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> *Colchester District Policing Review*, COMM0043278, Exhibit P-003278, pp. 22-23; *Cumberland District Policing Review*, COMM0043275, Exhibit P-003279, pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> A. Souhami, “Systematic Review”, COMM0058282, Exhibit P-002634, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> A. Souhami, “Systematic Review”, COMM0058282, Exhibit P-002634, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> A. Souhami, “Systematic Review”, COMM0058282, Exhibit P-002634, p. 22; K. Foster, “Crime Prevention”, COMM0053824, Exhibit P-002633, pp. 15 and 41-42; D. Doherty and J. Hornosty, “Exploring the Links”, COMM0059735, Exhibit P-003682, pp. 75, 76, 105, 107, 112.

to build relationships and trust with residents via proactive community policing, and to respond quickly to rural calls for service.

8. Following the mass casualty, the RCMP discovered that numerous community members had contemporaneous knowledge of the perpetrator's illegal firearms, replica cruiser and other police paraphernalia, and violence toward his common-law spouse and others. However, this information went largely unreported. Without clear, timely information from the public about potential criminal activity in their communities, police are limited in their ability to take action to prevent further harm.
9. The issues the Commission should carry forward with respect to rural policing include the maintenance of rural detachments and sufficient staffing to allow for adequate resources to:
  - a) respond quickly to calls for service;
  - b) maintain 24-hour coverage;
  - c) allow Members to respond with a partner in dangerous situations or where the presence of firearms is likely;
  - d) establish and maintain situated local knowledge; and
  - e) build and maintain community relationships, to enhance trust in police and the reporting of crime, including firearms and intimate partner/gender-based violence.
10. The Commission should consider how the absence of substantive provincial policing standards and a provincial crime prevention plan in Nova Scotia impacts service delivery in rural areas. The NPF submits that the Province must continue its consultation with all police services in Nova Scotia to review and expand provincial policing standards. The Province, the RCMP, and municipal police services must also engage in discussions to determine the minimum scope of specialized policing services that each police service is expected to have available, either from within their own service or through formal agreements with one another, and establish such formal agreements. Finally, the Province must develop and implement a provincial crime prevention plan, in consultation with all police services.

## ***B. Support Services for Survivors, Families, and Communities***

### RCMP Family Liaison Officer role should be more narrowly defined, with policy and training

11. The role of a sworn Member acting as a Family Liaison Officer ("FLO") has traditionally been a narrow one: as an informational conduit between the Major Crimes Unit (MCU) Command Triangle and family members, to provide regular updates about the criminal investigation.<sup>13</sup> The role of FLO is not defined by policy, however, and Members receive no training regarding the scope of this role or how to perform it effectively.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Testimony of Cst. Wayne Bent, June 21, 2022, COMM0059676, p. 198, lines 16-19; p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Testimony of C/Supt Darren Campbell, July 25, 2022, COMM0061287, p. 13, lines 7-9.

12. In the absence of policies, protocols, or training, only a single FLO was assigned to support families of the 21 civilian victims of the mass casualty, which proved insufficient given the significant demands of that role.<sup>15</sup> The FLO was required to rely on his life experience, skills, and professional experience as a police officer,<sup>16</sup> to navigate challenging issues such as conflict within families,<sup>17</sup> and the return to family members of residences, vehicles, or personal property.<sup>18</sup>
13. Gaps in supports offered by existing agencies (e.g., Victim Services, NSHA, municipalities), led to the FLO performing tasks for families that were unconnected to the MCU investigation. The NPF submits that many of those tasks are not best suited to a police officer's training or experience, and are not the most appropriate use of police resources in the aftermath of a mass casualty event. These tasks included liaising with insurance companies; arranging for the cleaning of residences and property; receiving and delivering gifts, cards, and donations; and communicating with family members about media coverage and online commentary.<sup>19</sup>
14. The Commission heard evidence that the needs of families may instead be better met by a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach.<sup>20</sup> The NPF supports recommendations to ensure that families are supported by resources or agencies with the most relevant training and experience – which may not always be the police – and for a defined FLO role that is limited to liaising with police during the investigation and court processes.

#### Fallen and injured Members need different treatment from victims' families

15. Due to the employment relationship between Members and the RCMP, it is appropriate for the RCMP to provide a high level of support to fallen and critically injured Members, including a Designated Family Liaison Officer (DFLO), and this support should remain codified in a dedicated policy.
16. NPF Members report to duty each day in service to the public knowing that they may face threats or danger that place their lives at risk. The RCMP has an obligation to provide families of fallen and injured Members appropriate information and assistance from a DFLO in areas that are uniquely tied to their public service and employment relationship with the RCMP. For example, the death or critical injury of a Member also triggers a number of consequences for the Members' compensation, pension, and

<sup>15</sup> See e.g., Testimony of C/Supt Campbell, COMM0061287, p. 14, lines 1-4.

<sup>16</sup> Testimony of Cst. Bent, COMM0059676, p. 57, lines 5-11.

<sup>17</sup> Testimony of Cst. Bent, COMM0059676, p. 58, lines 4-13; p. 57, lines 10-14.

<sup>18</sup> Testimony of Cst. Bent, COMM0059676, p. 39, lines 9-14; p. 57, lines 10-15; p. 76, lines 13-23; *Support Services for Survivors, Families, and Communities* Foundational Document, COMM0059120, Exhibit P-002346, para 116 [*Support Services*].

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Cst. Bent, COMM0059676, p. 39-43; *Support Services*, COMM0059120, Exhibit P-002346, paras 94, 97, 120, 139, 153, 221, 267, 299.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., MCC Interview of Commr. B. Lucki, COMM0062475, Exhibit P-004221, p. 65-66; Testimony of Commr. B. Lucki, August 23, 2022, COMM0063059, p. 130, lines 5-12; August 24, 2022, COMM0063224, p. 43-45; Testimony of A/Commr. L. Bergerman, August 23, 2022, COMM0063059, p. 23, lines 5-12. Testimony of C/Supt. Campbell, COMM0061291, p. 72, lines 21-28, p. 73, lines 1-10. Dr. Jaclyn Schildkraut, "Supporting Survivors and Communities after Mass Shootings", COMM0058367, Exhibit P-002619, p. 8, p. 21.

benefits,<sup>21</sup> as well as services in recognition of Members' sacrifice, such as repatriation<sup>22</sup> and a regimental funeral, where applicable.<sup>23</sup>

17. The NPF notes that the appointment of a dedicated DFLO for Csts. Stevenson and Morrison was consistent with the recommendations of the MacNeil Report regarding the shootings of RCMP Members in Moncton, New Brunswick in June 2014.<sup>24</sup>

Timing of information-sharing was influenced by the nature of the mass casualty event

18. The NPF welcomes recommendations to improve the sharing of information with affected individuals in the context of prolonged mass casualty events where there are multiple competing demands on police resources. In their evidence before the Commission, many NPF Members emphasized the importance of sharing as much information with victims' families as possible, and in as timely a manner as possible.<sup>25</sup>
19. While many next of kin notifications were provided while the mass casualty was ongoing,<sup>26</sup> Members were able to identify victims and share more information only once additional police resources became available after the perpetrator was taken down. This took place beginning in the afternoon and evening of April 19, 2020,<sup>27</sup> and ending no later than approximately 2 p.m. on April 20, 2020.<sup>28</sup>
20. In assessing the information shared with family members, the Commission should bear in mind the significant challenges facing Members. For example, many inquiries from families came in while the perpetrator was still actively committing homicides in the community, when Members were allocating frontline, specialist, and investigative police resources to stopping that threat. Members were also required to balance the timeliness

<sup>21</sup> "Critically Injured and Fallen Members Guide", COMM0053641, Exhibit P-001585, p. 56 ff.

<sup>22</sup> "Critically Injured and Fallen Members Guide", September 1, 2019, COMM0053641, Exhibit P-001585, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> "Critically Injured and Fallen Members Guide", COMM0053641, Exhibit P-001585, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> "MacNeil Report", April 1, 2019, COMM0050843, Exhibit P-001629, p. 164, Recommendation 12.10.

<sup>25</sup> Mass Casualty Commission – Transcript of Interview with Cpl. Gerard Rose-Berthiaume, April 27, 2022, COMM0057748, Exhibit P-001588, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> The Blair family received a next of kin death notification from Csts. Fahie and Coleman at 2:34 a.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 37). The McCully family received a presumed death notification from Sgt. Lilly at 1:48 a.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 52). The Campbell/Hyslop family received a death notification from S/Sgt Learning and Cst. Counter around 11:00 a.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 247, see also 249). The O'Brien family received a death notification from Csts. Fahie and Coleman at 11:17 a.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 281, see also para 284).

<sup>27</sup> The Bagley family received a death notification from Csts. Harvey and Bray at 2:15 pm. On April 19, 2020. The Jenkins/McLeod family received a presumed death notification from Cst. Harvey around 6:00 p.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 225). The Bond family received a presumed death notifications from Cpl. Rose-Berthiaume on the night of April 19, 2020 (MCC Interview with Cpl. Rose-Berthiaume, COMM0057748, Exhibit P-001588, p. 20, 33). The Tuck/Oliver family received a presumed death notification from Cpl. Rose-Berthiaume at 11:30 p.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 170). The Beaton family received a death notification from Csts. MacFarlane and Woolcock at 6:00 p.m. on April 19, 2020. The Webber family received a presumed death notification from Sgts. Legge and Raaymakers at 7:55 p.m. on April 19, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 318).

<sup>28</sup> The Gulenchyn family received presumed death notifications from Cst. Bent at 11:30 a.m. and 11:46 a.m. on April 20, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, para 79). The Zahl family received presumed death notifications from Cst. Bent at 12:50 p.m. and 1:32 p.m. on April 20, 2020 (NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, paras 109-10).

of next of kin notifications with the accuracy of the information being provided,<sup>29</sup> particularly in the face of crime scenes that had been burned and in the absence of identifiable physical remains of some victims.

### Casualties on Cobequid Court

21. NPF Members have acknowledged with regret the grief experienced by members of the Bond and Tuck/Oliver families, whose loved ones' remains were not discovered until the late afternoon of April 19, 2020.<sup>30</sup>
22. The evidence before the Commission is that this delay occurred in part because police resources were allocated in priority to stopping the threat while the perpetrator remained active,<sup>31</sup> and then to ensuring continuity of security of crime scenes as Members who had been on duty since the night before were relieved, and as the CIC transitioned the file to the MCU.<sup>32</sup> Though a systematic evacuation of the community had commenced on the morning of April 19, 2020, the process was halted once the perpetrator became active in another location, before police were able to reach Cobequid Court.
23. Though Cst. Dorrington conducted a drive through of Portapique on April 19, 2020, he did not note anything amiss from his vantage point at the Bond or Tuck/Oliver residences or have any indication that further investigation at those houses was required.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, the houses on Cobequid Court were checked in response to a wellness inquiry received by Cpl. Jarret MacDonald which prompted him to attend at 41 Cobequid Court and to check the open door he noticed at 46 Cobequid Court.<sup>34</sup> Finding these victims prompted Cpl. MacDonald to request additional resources to conduct a thorough search of the neighbourhood, with the assistance of Cst. Skipper Bent and Cpl. Brad Wood. Members provided notifications to members of the Bond and Tuck/Oliver families once they could tentatively identify the casualties and their next of kin, late on the evening of April 19, 2020.<sup>35</sup>
24. The NPF welcomes recommendations to address the timely identification of victims and crime scenes during a prolonged critical incident, including ensuring the allocation of adequate resources to this task.

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<sup>29</sup> MCC Interview of Cpl. Rose-Berthiaume, COMM0057748, Exhibit P-001588, p. 18-19. Testimony of Cst. Bent, COMM0059676, p. 23, lines 22-24.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Testimony of Sgt. Andrew O'Brien, May 31, 2022, COMM0058858, p. 47, lines 1-6.

<sup>31</sup> Testimony of Cst. Nick Dorrington, June 20, 2022, COMM0059596, p. 54, lines 18-26; p. 55, lines 1-17; p. 69, lines 1-16; Testimony of S/Sgt. Allan Carroll, May 26, 2022, COMM0059601, p. 91-92.

<sup>32</sup> Testimony of Sgt. O'Brien, May 31, 2022, COMM0058858, p. 47, lines 14-17; Testimony of S/Sgt. Carroll, COMM0059601, p. 118, lines 19-28; p. 119, lines 11-13.

<sup>33</sup> Testimony of Cst. Dorrington, COMM0059596, p. 58, lines 3-21, p. 59, lines 5-7.

<sup>34</sup> MCC Interview with Cpl. Jarret MacDonald, COMM0059036, [not yet exhibited], p. 27-30.

<sup>35</sup> MCC Interview with Cpl. Rose-Berthiaume, COMM0057748, Exhibit P-001588, p. 20, 33. NOK, COMM0058972, Exhibit P-002222, paras 170-75.

### **C. Member wellness supports after a critical incident**

25. The Commission has heard both expert evidence and first-person accounts of the impacts of the mass casualty event on Member mental health. The NPF urges the Commission to consider how our Members and other first responders can be better supported after engaging in a critical incident or experiencing the loss of a colleague on duty.

#### Peer-to-peer support program not adequate to meet Members' needs

26. The expert evidence before the Commission emphasizes the role of peer support as a valuable compliment to traditional counseling;<sup>36</sup> however, the peer supports offered to Members following the mass casualty were not adequate to meet their needs. The peer-to-peer support program offered by the RCMP in H-Division is composed of part-time, volunteer positions.<sup>37</sup> It had been launched in Nova Scotia in the fall of 2019, and at the time of the mass casualty, there were only eighteen peer support volunteers in the province.<sup>38</sup>
27. The absence of peer supporters with experience responding to a critical incident reduced the impact and efficacy of the peer supports offered by the RCMP. In particular, Members complained that the peer volunteers who reached out to them had no experience responding to a critical incident, which lessened the value of their support. Cpl. Trent Milton, the second-in-command for the Emergency Response Team with 17 years of service at the time of the mass casualty, for example, explained that he and other Members of ERT received calls from peer support volunteers from other jurisdictions with short service and no comparable experience:

It was calls from Members that were Northwest Territories, BC, and it was ... it was calls from Members with a year, year and a half service that had never been through anything... that really had no background. And they're calling people like and just engage this individual and trying to give him support, and they had never been through anything, right. And so, those are the things that our organization really need to build upon.<sup>39</sup>

28. To be effective, peer support must be offered by someone with comparable lived experience of a critical incident. During her roundtable testimony, Dr. Jaclyn Schildkraut explained that peer support is valuable "because they're able to say to individuals, 'We understand where you've been, and we can even tell you 18, 19, 20 years later, here's what our journey looked like, and yours might look different, but here's some holes you might need to navigate or work around.'"<sup>40</sup> In the specific context of public safety personnel, experts have noted that peer supports with lived experience increases their

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<sup>36</sup> Roundtable Testimony of Dr. Jaclyn Schildkraut, p. 64, lines 21-22.

<sup>37</sup> Mass Casualty Commission – Transcript of Interview with Kelly Sullivan, April 19, 2022, COMM0057753, Exhibit P-002408, p.40.

<sup>38</sup> MCC Interview with K. Sullivan, COMM0057753, Exhibit P-002408, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Mass Casualty Commission – Transcript of Interview with Cst. Trent Milton, COMM0037115, Exhibit P-000415, p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> Roundtable Testimony of Dr. Jaclyn Schildkraut, p. 64, lines 21-24.

credibility and makes them more trustworthy.<sup>41</sup> Peer supports must also be properly trained and able to ensure confidentiality in the services that they offer.

29. The NPF supports recommendations to improve the efficacy of peer support programs for Members, including measures to ensure that a diversity of peer supporters are available to connect with Members with similar types of service and experience.

#### Absence of authority for administrative reassignments following a traumatic event

30. A major gap in supports available to Members following the mass casualty was the ability to be reassigned to administrative or modified duties for non-medical reasons, in order to decompress with peers in a supportive environment, where desired by individual Members. The NPF supports recommendations to ensure that appropriate policies and resources are in place to allow Members to have flexibility in their working arrangements following a critical incident.
31. Expert evidence before the Commission supports that individuals process traumatic events differently, and have different needs for their own wellness.<sup>42</sup> Kelly Sullivan, Employee and Management Relations Officer (EMRO) for H-Division, shared a similar perspective from her observations of Members in the days following the mass casualty, in her interview to Commission investigators:

Well I was at the detachments with our employees. I can tell you that most of the members didn't want to be at home. They felt lost. The only place they wanted to be was around their colleagues. They wanted to be at work. Were they capable of working? Absolutely not for some of them. And others needed to be out on the road in their community.

Okay. Now I do not believe that a blanket decision should be made that nobody should be working. I believe that people should be given the choice for their own wellness, unless we determine they are medically unfit for duty.<sup>43</sup>

32. Ms. Sullivan explained, however, that the RCMP lacks any policy authorizing non-medical administrative reassignments or “operational standing down” following a critical incident.<sup>44</sup> RCMP policy only provides for Members to go off duty sick if they are medically unfit for duties. The absence of any “middle ground” between regular duties and medical leave was reaffirmed by the RCMP during participant consultations on September 1, 2022.

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<sup>41</sup> Siddiqui, Martin K. et al, “Differences in Mental Health, Help-Seeking and Barriers to Care Between Civilians and Sworn Members Working in Law Enforcement: A Research Note” *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* (2021) 36:627, COMM0059238, Exhibit P-002630, p. 631.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Roundtable Testimony of Dr. Terry Mitchell, June 28, 2022, COMM0059602, p. 46-47.

<sup>43</sup> MCC Interview with K. Sullivan, April 19, 2022, COMM0057753, Exhibit P-002408, p. 67, see also, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> MCC Interview with K. Sullivan, April 19, 2022, COMM0057753, Exhibit P-002408, p. 66, 68.



33. In the absence of clear authority in policy, there was inconsistency in the working arrangements available to Members in H-Division in April 2020.<sup>45</sup> In particular, RCMP did not immediately approve a request to allow part-time ERT Members to be reassigned to administrative duties within ERT, to allow ERT Members to decompress as a team.<sup>46</sup> This decision led to a deterioration of morale within ERT, and to a number of Members going off duty sick – further exacerbating feelings of isolation and undermining Member wellness.<sup>47</sup>
34. The MacNeil Report endorsed the decision of senior management to provide 14 days of administrative leave immediately to all employees in Codiac following the Moncton shooting in 2014:

Following the capture of the shooter, senior management provided 14 days of administrative leave immediately to all employees in Codiac. The decision was based on two things; recognizing how the tragedy may affect the mental health of employees and the need to maintain regular policing services as part of the Codiac policing contract. Administrative leave provided time for members who responded to the occurrence to prepare statements and complete notes without interference from general duties. More importantly, it allowed “J” Division an appropriate amount of time to provide mental health care to employees as quickly as possible without adversely affecting the level of policing the community had come to expect. The administrative leave allowed employees to participate in critical incident debriefings, one-on-one counselling, peer support opportunities and time with family without the added pressure of having to report to work at the same time. Senior management saw these as necessary element to aid the healing of employees to allow Codiac to becoming fully operational as quickly as possible.<sup>48</sup>

As noted by Ms. Sullivan, however, this decision by Codiac senior management “[didn’t] exist in policy”.<sup>49</sup>

35. In considering this issue, the Commission should be cognizant that some Members’ wellness may be better supported by opportunities to decompress with peers on modified duties in the workplace. Moreover, the opportunity for Members to take the time they need to decompress following a critical incident requires adequate resources to cover for those Members’ regular duties. A lack of resources was an added impediment to offering this kind of support to Members following the mass casualty.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> MCC Interview with K. Sullivan, April 19, 2022, COMM0057753, Exhibit P-002408, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> Mass Casualty Commission – Transcript of Interview with Cpl. Tim Mills, COMM0015513, Exhibit P-000405, p. 116-18; MCC Interview with Cst. T. Milton, COMM0037115, Exhibit P-000415, p. 98; Testimony of A/Commr Lee Bergerman, August 23, 2022, p. 26-27.

<sup>47</sup> Mass Casualty Commission – Transcript of Interview with Cpl. Tim Mills, COMM0015513, Exhibit P-000405, p. 116-18; MCC Interview with Cst. T. Milton, COMM0037115, Exhibit P-000415, p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> MacNeil Report, Independent Review: Moncton Shooting, June 4, 2014, COMM0050843, Exhibit P-001629, p. 157-58.

<sup>49</sup> MCC Interview with K. Sullivan, April 19, 2022, COMM0057753, Exhibit P-002408, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> Testimony of A/Commr Lee Bergerman, August 23, 2022, p. 26-27.

### Support needed for spouses and families of RCMP Members

36. Expert evidence before the Commission suggests that police officers are highly likely to rely on spouses or family members for support in the wake of a critical incident, or in relation to work-related trauma.<sup>51</sup> This evidence is consistent with the information collected by the NPF from its Members about post-event supports in relation to the mass casualty event.
37. However, Members' spouses and children are largely excluded from broader conversations about the impacts of first responder traumatic exposures, and from employer or community supports. The NPF urges the Commission to consider the need for supports for Members' families when identifying ways to support wellness in our communities arising from mass casualty or other traumatic events.

### Rural understaffing contributes to workplace stress and undermines wellness supports

38. The Commission has received expert evidence that the isolation, workload burden, and increased safety risks that result from understaffing rural detachments results in increased stress experienced by Members.<sup>52</sup> This has two important consequences: a reduction in baseline resilience for police officers who experience trauma arising from a critical incident, and the inability to take leave from regular duties when necessary for decompression or medical leave because there is no one to backfill their positions.
39. The Commission must address the wellness impacts of chronic understaffing in rural detachments, aside from the public and officer safety consequences of this problem.

### Organizational support and culture

40. The Commission has received expert evidence of the importance of perceived organizational support on wellness of police officers.<sup>53</sup> Our Members have told the Commission that a lack of strong leadership support internally from the RCMP, and in public-facing communications after the mass casualty events, made it more difficult to cope with the post-traumatic stress and loss that they had experienced. During her testimony, Commissioner Brenda Lucki acknowledged and apologized that she had not come out to Nova Scotia to support Members.<sup>54</sup>
41. There is also evidence before the Commission that senior officers in H Division were deeply dissatisfied by interventions from National Headquarters, and with the overall

<sup>51</sup> Siddiqui, Martin K. et al, "Differences in Mental Health, Help-Seeking and Barriers to Care Between Civilians and Sworn Members Working in Law Enforcement: A Research Note" *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* (2021) 36:627, COMM0059238, Exhibit P-002630; Carleton R. N. et al, "Mental Health Training, Attitudes Toward Support, and Screening Positive for Mental Disorders" (2020), COMM0059307, Exhibit P-002628.

<sup>52</sup> Ricciardelli, R. "Risk It Out, Risk It Out", *Police Quarterly*, 2018, COMM0059287, Exhibit P-002641.

<sup>53</sup> Birze, A. et al. "Perceived organizational support and emotional labour among police communicators: what can organizational context tell us about posttraumatic stress?" (11 March 2021), COMM0059244, Exhibit P-002627; Roundtable Testimony of Dr. Arija Birze, June 30, 2022, COMM0059605, p. 18, lines 18-26, p. 19, lines 1-4.

<sup>54</sup> Testimony of Comm. Brenda Lucki, August 24, 2022, p 130.

institutional support they received in the wake of the mass casualty.<sup>55</sup> These challenges in turn impacted NPF Members in Nova Scotia.

42. The NPF urges the Commission to consider how the leadership culture of the RCMP can be improved such that Members who experience a major critical incident or loss of colleagues feel that their organization supports them.

Public grief, loss and community relationships

43. Members in “H” Division lost a beloved colleague who was murdered by the perpetrator. Cst. Heidi Stevenson lived and worked in Nova Scotia for most of her life and career with the RCMP, and was deeply connected through her family to her community. This loss impacted many Members who were not on duty during the mass casualty response, or who may not have been obviously identified by the RCMP as in need of post-event supports.
44. Another Member, Cst. Chad Morrison, was shot by the perpetrator while responding to the call for service, and survived. His experience highlighted the personal risk that NPF Members and other first responders take, in the interest of public safety.
45. Throughout the Commission’s work, many participants have excluded NPF Members and Cst. Stevenson’s family from those identified as “most affected” by the tragedy. Media criticism of the RCMP response, and the Commission’s own singular focus on our Members’ actions, have encouraged public alienation and exacerbated feelings of isolation of our Members from the community they serve. These experiences significantly sharpened the individual grief and loss felt by our Members after this event, and negatively impacted their wellness.
46. The NPF urges the Commission in its work to remember Cst. Stevenson’s sacrifice and to acknowledge NPF Members as individuals directly affected by the mass casualty, and to consider how public treatment of police following a mass casualty can impact individual wellness.

Yours truly,  
NIJHAWAN MCMILLAN PETRUNIA



Nasha Nijhawan



Kelly McMillan



Jaime Burnet

<sup>55</sup> Quintet Consulting, Summary Report Wellness Assessment, COMM0063605.