

Public Proceedings Final Remarks

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Commissioner Michael MacDonald, Chair

1. Good afternoon everyone. Bonjour à tous.
2. We join you from Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
3. Today we reach the end of public proceedings for the Mass Casualty Commission. We have achieved this thanks to the hard work of many, many people over many months.
4. Aujourd'hui, nous arrivons à la fin des débats publics de la Commission des pertes massives. Nous allons revenir sur le chemin parcouru, sur la façon dont nous en sommes arrivés là et sur tout ce que nous avons appris en cours de route.
5. Given this milestone moment, we will take a look back at how far we have come together, what we learned along the way, and what comes next.
6. We will look ahead to the Commission's final report—and the very important role we all need to play in order to put the coming recommendations to work.
7. From our very first day as Commissioners on this inquiry, our work has been inspired by the memories of the lives taken and the impact of all those affected by the April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia.
8. Starting with those whose lives were taken. We pause to remember them every morning, and we carry their names with us every day.
9. We also think of those who were injured, and the family members and friends who lost their loved ones, here in Nova Scotia, in Canada and in the United States.
10. We know that the impact of the events affected many.
11. The witnesses, first responders and service providers who were at the scenes, and *all* those who stepped up afterwards to help respond and support those most affected.
12. The communities who lost friends, neighbours, and their sense of shared safety.
13. And the broader public who joined with those survivors, families, witnesses, responders and communities in shared grief and mourning.

14. The extent of the harm has been deep and far reaching. So much loss, so much harm, caused by one person's actions—rippling out like waves.
15. Since the beginning of this public inquiry, our purpose has been clear:
 - To find out what happened.
 - To explore how and why it happened, looking into the underlying issues and root causes.
 - Then, building on everything we learned, to bring forward recommendations that can help to make our communities safer.
16. We took on this responsibility to ensure that all those lives taken and all that harm suffered will not have been in vain.
17. Those whose lives were taken were individuals, just like you and me. They contributed and made a difference in the places they lived. We cannot allow the mass casualty to be the last word on their legacies. Instead, we all must continue to work to honour the family and community bonds that mattered so much to them, as they do to us. We must continue to take action to build safer communities.
18. There are communities just like those involved in the mass casualty right across Canada. The recent events in Saskatchewan are a painful reminder of this. And there are lessons we can all learn and actions we can all take to strengthen community safety.
19. That is why, as a joint national and provincial inquiry, our scope has been national and we have also looked to lessons learned from beyond our borders, to ensure we can be learning from others to make improvements here in Canada.
20. If this seems like a broad approach, well, it needed to be. The mass casualty was the largest mass shooting in modern Canadian history. It involved 17 crime scenes. There were multiple lives taken, two others shot and many more people harmed or affected. Hundreds of witnesses and responders were involved. And, as we have learned, many thousands of pieces of evidence and related information were generated.
21. From the outset we faced an immense task, a very broad mandate and an equally ambitious timeline, requiring us to complete our work in just over two years. Our mandate was set out for us in orders in council from both the federal and provincial governments, providing the directions and boundaries for our work, including the requirement to explore the broader causes, context and circumstances behind the mass casualty.

22. Like the rest of the world over the last few years, we also had to contend with the uncertainty and challenges of a global pandemic.
23. Once our work began we also faced consistent challenges around the pace, unpredictability and volume of document disclosure.
24. Despite these challenging circumstances, together with Participants and the public, we have stepped up to the work with the care and dedication it deserves.
25. It was important to us to build this Commission on independence, respect and transparency.
26. In early 2021 we moved quickly to bring together an expert team from scratch, with a wide-ranging area of specialties, so we could ramp up our independent investigation.
27. We designed a process that would be flexible and efficient, taking full advantage of all the powers of a public inquiry to investigate, to subpoena witnesses and documents, but also to explore the broader root causes through wide-ranging work grounded in research and policy.
28. We designed an approach that would allow the different phases of our work to overlap while also building on each other. Simply put, this meant starting with a thorough investigation into what happened, then building from there to explore the underlying issues and root causes. Then, based on everything we have learned, we are now able to consider potential recommendations as well as how to make sure they are implementable.
29. Early in our work we made a call for Participants, bringing in those most affected individuals, families, governments, first responders and organizations including advocacy groups. These were the people and groups who were by our orders in council automatically granted or applied for the opportunity for appropriate participation, and who continue to have a substantial or direct interest in the subject matter of the inquiry.
30. As you know, the Participants and their counsel have played an integral role in our work, providing feedback on the Rules of Practice and Procedure, helping to review the Foundational Documents, highlight material gaps and issues, identifying and questioning witnesses, contributing to roundtables and other discussions, and providing regular written and oral submissions for us to consider—including the final oral submissions we have been hearing this week.
31. We know that not all Participants have always agreed with our decisions or our approach at every step as we worked to fulfil our mandate, but despite this they remained committed to

the work of the Commission and our shared goal of making sure changes happen, so that our communities will be safer.

32. We recognize that the Participants and the wider public wanted to know what happened. We have done everything we could to ensure that the Commission's investigation and proceedings were comprehensive and thorough.
33. Over the course of our work, the Commission has interviewed more than 230 people, including more than 80 RCMP officers.
34. Through subpoenas, we gathered tens of thousands of documents, videos and audio files from the RCMP and others.
35. Our investigative work included various visits to the sites involved in the mass casualty as well.
36. We developed 31 Foundational Documents in order to organize, analyze and distribute all this information efficiently. We shared them publicly along with over 3,800 supporting source materials and additional exhibits, providing extensive information about what happened on and leading up to April 18th and 19th, 2020.
37. This approach meant we could be efficient and thoughtful when calling witnesses during public proceedings, focusing on those witnesses required to address material issues and factual gaps.
38. Before presenting the Foundational Documents, we held working meetings with Participant counsel over many weeks to get their feedback and input, which was incorporated into the documents.
39. Then we shared our understanding of the evidence by presenting each Foundational Document during public proceedings, which prompted further investigative leads and identified errors and gaps as we went along.
40. Through the Foundational Documents and supporting materials, we shared our understanding of what happened at the 17 crime scenes involved in the mass casualty:
 - What happened in Portapique, April 18-19, 2020 (from the perspective of the residents)
 - First Responder Actions in Portapique
 - Containment Points in and Around Portapique
 - What Happened Overnight in Debert
 - At 2328 Hunter Road

- At Highway 4, Wentworth
 - At Highway 4, Glenholme
 - On Plains Road, Debert
 - At the Onslow Belmont Fire Brigade Hall
 - In Shubenacadie
 - On Highway 224
 - And at the Enfield Big Stop
41. We also shared Foundational Documents about the systems and processes that had a bearing on what happened, including:
- Police Paraphernalia
 - Confirmation of the Replica RCMP Cruiser
 - Firearms
 - Alert Ready in Nova Scotia
 - The RCMP Emergency Response Team
 - RCMP Command Post, Operational Communications Centre, and Command Decisions
 - Truro Police Service
 - RCMP Public Communications
 - Air Support
 - Halifax Regional Police and Halifax District RCMP Operations
 - 911 Call-Taking and Dispatch
 - TMR2 Radio Communications System in Nova Scotia
42. We shared additional Foundational Documents about:
- What happened involving Information Seeking from Families and Next of Kin Notifications
 - Support Services for Survivors, Families, and Communities
 - And, Public Communications from the RCMP and Governments after the Mass Casualty.
43. Finally, we shared Foundational Documents that organized what we had learned about the perpetrator and his background, including:
- Violence in the Perpetrator's Family of Origin

- The Perpetrator's Violent Behaviour Towards Others
 - The Perpetrator's Violence Towards His Common-Law Spouse, and
 - The Perpetrator's Financial Misdealings
44. Through a regular submission process, we invited the Participants to share with us any material gaps or issues arising from the Foundational Documents that would require more exploration through witness testimony.
 45. We also called 60 witnesses during public proceedings, hearing from them as individuals and sometimes as panels when that was the more efficient and cohesive approach. For each witness, independent Commission counsel would ask questions in the public interest and questions that had been developed in consultation with Participants. Commission counsel would then caucus with Participant counsel, meeting to determine whether Participants had additional questions and in which order these would be asked, to minimize duplication and maximize effectiveness. With very few exceptions, Participant counsel could question the witnesses directly.
 46. We heard from a broad spectrum of witnesses, including experts, community members, responders and more than 30 RCMP members, including the senior officers who were in charge both here in Nova Scotia and at the national level at the time of the mass casualty. The witnesses helped us build our understanding of what happened and how and why it happened. Some shared suggestions for recommendations too, which we were grateful to receive.
 47. Through the course of proceedings, we also shared 45 supplementary reports, which include the results of further investigation into specific questions or events, including information about the perpetrator's use of radios and scanners, information about handcuffs used in the mass casualty, and an analysis of Emergency Health Services GPS data.
 48. All of the Foundational Documents, all of the source materials, all of the supplementary reports and all of the witness interview transcripts are available on the Commission's website. They will assist us Commissioners as we prepare our final report and findings. And we hope they will continue to assist the Participants, the public and anyone else who wants to know what happened.
 49. As we have been learning about what happened through these different steps and approaches, we also were grateful to the more than 900 members of the public who shared

their experiences of the mass casualty with us through our online survey. Your contributions helped to build our understanding of the broad impacts of these events.

50. Before I finish, let me say that it remains a very great honour to be serving as a Commissioner on this inquiry, alongside Commissioners Fitch and Stanton. We did not take on this responsibility lightly, and we could never have reached this point in the process without the contributions of so many people. Thank you all.
51. This has been a hard journey, for the families, for Participants, and for everyone involved. Every day we have been asked to confront the great harm and loss suffered during the mass casualty anew. Given this, throughout the course of our work we have stayed focused on wellness and mental health, making sure dedicated team members and resources were available to assist those taking part, and that we shared information about how to access wellness support services through our website.
52. Together, we did this work to honour the memories of all those who were lost and all those who were affected and to help making meaningful change for the future.
53. We now have a solid basis upon which to make meaningful, achievable recommendations. I know all of you have what it takes to go farther, and to make sure the coming recommendations are implemented. Together, we can make our communities safer.
54. Thank you everyone. I will now hand over to Commissioner Stanton.

Commissioner Kim Stanton

55. Thank you Commissioner MacDonald and good afternoon everyone.
56. Over the course of our work, we have been building layers of understanding. As Commissioner MacDonald has reminded us, the first layer or phase focused on building a thorough, factual foundation of what happened.
57. The second phase focused on how and why things happened as they did.
58. This involved exploring the related issues set out in our mandate, to make sure we were taking into account how underlying factors such as intimate partner violence and gender-based violence, firearms access, police and service provider responses, structures and processes, and emergency communications, contributed to the mass casualty.
59. Another way to think about these issues is as root causes—the cultures, values, structures, processes and systems that need to be understood so we can work out what needs to

change, so that the causes, context and circumstances that gave rise to the mass casualty can be fully addressed.

60. We used a number of different approaches to explore the related issues.
61. We engaged independent researchers to prepare 22 Commissioned Reports about the related issues in our mandate, drawing on key government and policy structures, as well as academic research and lessons learned from previous mass casualties in other places. All of the Commissioned Reports, and more than 1,100 documents of supporting research and policy relevant to our mandate, are available on the Commission's website.
62. Several Commissioned Reports explored different aspects of policing culture and practices. Some focused on aspects of critical incident decision making. Some looked at potential contributing factors to mass casualties, while others explored the connections between gender, violence, poverty, race and access to institutional supports, as well as the reluctance of some communities to report violence due to profound distrust in public safety institutions.
63. The Commissioned Reports also provided a framework for our roundtables.
64. Over the course of proceedings we held more than 20 roundtables involving over 100 experts and others with relevant experience to share, some of them local, and others bringing Canadian and international perspectives.
65. Roundtable discussions allowed us to hear from a deep and diverse set of perspectives, knowledge and experiences, all of it shedding light on those underlying issues, systems and structures that we need to address. People taking part in the roundtables spoke to a wide range of topics, including policing cultures, structures and interoperability; emergency alerting, preventing and responding to mass casualties; addressing gender-based and intimate partner violence; and strengthening community safety.
66. We have held other kinds of conversations during public proceedings too, including small group sessions with people who had related and important experiences to share, and consultations with groups who were differentially impacted, so we could ensure that our recommendations do not inadvertently have a disproportionate or unintended impact on disadvantaged or marginalized groups.
67. Through the Commissioned Reports, roundtables and various other kinds of discussion, we have built up an extensive understanding of causes underlying the mass casualty.

68. There is a Discussion Guide available on the website that you can use to prompt thoughts or conversations about the issues we have explored including, for example:
69. **Public communication during an emergency**, looking into:
- The decision making process for sending a public alert during a mass casualty
 - Technical information about emergency alerting
 - The design, implementation, capabilities and limitations of the Canada's emergency alerting system, or Alert Ready program
 - Best practices and useful models for emergency communications in other countries
 - How to convey important information to the general public as well as to first responders at the tactical level and to other emergency responder agencies, and
 - How to share important information from the public in emergencies
70. We have looked into **supporting individuals, families, first responders, service providers and communities after a mass casualty**, including:
- Learning about what worked or did not work for survivors, those most affected and support services of this mass casualty and other mass casualties
 - Considering international experiences with the sharing of information and support following mass casualties
 - Exploring best practices for addressing the needs of those most affected and models that support people through grieving, and that promote healing and foster resiliency, and
 - Trying to distill key principles for supporting those most affected, including comprehensive support services that are tailored to meet different needs
71. Another issue we have explored is **the link between gender-based and intimate partner violence and the mass casualty**:
- We have heard about the dynamics of violence generally and more specifically gender-based and intimate partner violence as linked to the causes, context and circumstances of the mass casualty
 - We heard about how understanding the dynamics between these forms of violence could assist in the development of policies to better understand, prepare for, identify warning signs for and respond to mass casualty events

- How prioritizing prevention of these forms of violence as a social and political objective may be a promising strategy for preventing some mass casualties
 - And the barriers to effective police and other institutional prevention, intervention and responses to intimate partner violence, gender-based violence and family violence
72. We explored issues related to **improving community safety and well-being**, including:
- Best practices for improving community safety that goes beyond crime and policing and includes mental, physical and social well-being
 - Approaches focused on community development and contemporary community policing, coordinated leadership and enhanced ability to intervene early and employ preventive strategies
 - Police and law enforcement agencies, public service institutions, organizations and systems that are mandated to help keep communities safe
 - Individual and community opportunities to keep each other safer and to support each other in the future
73. We have examined **the current structure and approach to policing**, including:
- The working culture and organization of policing and law enforcement within Canada and in other countries
 - Police responses to mass casualties, including training, standard operating procedures, equipment and resources
 - The need to break down silos of work within police agencies and between police and non-police partner agencies
 - How numerous Nova Scotian and other Canadian reviews and reports have made recommendations with respect to many issues such as police oversight, training, preparation, and organizational culture
 - How too often these recommendations remain unimplemented
 - How assessments of the implementation of past recommendations may provide an additional perspective into the police context and can identify recurring challenges in achieving reform, and
 - Barriers to change and strategies for understanding and overcoming these barriers
74. We have explored issues related to **firearms access**, including:

- Policies about how police respond to reports of the possession of prohibited firearms, including communications between law enforcement agencies
- The broader context of rural gun ownership and community safety
- Past recommendations about access to firearms in the context of active shooter events
- Connections between gender-based and intimate partner violence and firearms
- And legal and policy interventions, including firearms registration systems, risk assessment, the limitations of reporting mechanisms when civilians are worried about safety as a result of the acquisition or presence of firearms, and the use of pro-removal policies in situations of intimate partner and family violence.

75. We have also looked into how the private ownership of police paraphernalia is regulated, including:

- The impact of the perpetrator's police paraphernalia and replica RCMP vehicle in the mass casualty
- The current regime for regulating procurement, access, and disposal of police paraphernalia
- Differing impacts of police symbols
- The negative impact of criminal behaviour by police impersonators and its wider impact on trust in police
- A range of views on the question of whether the advantages of allowing police uniforms, equipment and vehicles to circulate in the general population outweigh the risks.

76. It is a long list of issues and topics, but I can assure you that I have just scratched the surface of everything relevant to our mandate we heard and have learned through the roundtables, Commissioned Reports, resource materials and other conversations held during public proceedings.

77. As a public inquiry, we also invited members of the public to make submissions through our website with suggestions for research or policy that might be relevant to our work. We have received over 200 entries through that process. Thank you to everyone who made a public submission. You can still submit suggestions for recommendations for change on our website until the end of September.

78. The April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia was a large, interconnected and complex critical incident. The perpetrator had also harmed many people in many ways before the mass casualty. The issues underlying these actions are also broad, interconnected and complex.
79. If we want to help prevent future mass casualties, we need to address the root causes. And this means doing the hard work in our communities, our workplaces, our institutions and in our legislatures to make deep and lasting changes.
80. This coming responsibility may sound daunting, but please remember that at its heart this is really about doing the work required to take care of people. Our loved ones and our families. Our friends and neighbours. Our colleagues. We all want to live in safe communities. It will take all of us to make that happen.
81. Before I finish, I would also like to say that it has been an honour to join with Commissioners MacDonald and Fitch, serving the public. In a moment, Commissioner Fitch will thank the many different groups of people involved in our work in a more comprehensive way. For my part, to everyone who has joined us in our service of the public interest: thank you.
82. Now Commissioner Fitch will share some concluding remarks.

Commissioner Leanne J. Fitch

83. Thank you Commissioner Stanton, Commissioner MacDonald and hello everyone.
84. This afternoon my fellow Commissioners have reiterated why we are here, how far we have come together, and what we have achieved in our work to understand what happened and how and why it happened.
85. Over recent weeks, we have been making progress in the final phase of our public proceedings, which was all about deepening our understanding with the aim of developing recommendations.
86. I will now share our forward-looking focus, and the final report and recommendations.
87. As we said at the start of this phase, our goal is to develop recommendations that:
 - Are built on everything we have learned
 - Are informed by the perspectives of many people with different kinds of expertise and experience

- Draw on recommendations from earlier inquiries and reports, including an understanding of what has worked and what has prevented progress in the past
 - Recommendations that are clear, pragmatic and implementable, so that people across our governments, institutions and communities can begin to take action right away.
88. To help us develop recommendations like these, we have held roundtables, Participant consultations and discussions with those most affected and community members to ensure we are benefiting from a rich, diverse set of perspectives and experiences.
89. We are also encouraging all Canadians and those who are interested from beyond our borders to continue to share ideas for change. Information about how to do that is available on the Mass Casualty Commission's website.
90. As Commissioner Stanton noted, on our website you can find a Discussion Guide summarizing the type of issues we are exploring and asking questions to help you think about recommendations. We hope this will encourage and help you discuss potential changes and recommendations with your coworkers, families, friends and neighbours.
91. Also, on our website you will find the Environmental Scan of Prior Recommendations. This comprehensive document is directly related to our broad mandate, capturing over 2,000 relevant recommendations from earlier public inquiries, reviews and investigations. The reviews are grouped according to the research structure developed by the Research and Policy team of the Mass Casualty Commission. This is intended to help identify gaps and opportunities, inspire new recommendations, and also help us all reflect on the barriers that have prevented meaningful change in the past.
92. After today, the Commission's public proceedings are over. But our work is far from done.
93. While you may not hear from us as often, or see us in our daily proceedings, in the weeks and months ahead we will be exclusively focused on preparing and completing the Commission's final report, which will be shared publicly by March 31, 2023.
94. We will use this time to ensure the final report is completed with the rigour and care it deserves.
95. As you might expect, the final report will be comprehensive. It needs to be both broad and deep, in order to fulfil our mandate, in order to share our detailed findings of what happened, and in order to convey everything we have learned while exploring the underlying causes and issues.

96. The final report, which will be available in both English and French, will include the Commission's recommendations. We will be working hard to make these as clear and effective as possible. We know recommendations alone are not enough and so we will be including guidance about who could—and who *should*—do what, when, and how. This is intended to build in mechanisms to track and hold to account the responsibilities of others going forward.
97. In this time between the end of proceedings and the release of the final report, we encourage everyone to keep up the many conversations about community safety and wellbeing. We have seen so many examples of groups coming together and having important, valuable conversations. Please keep collaborating and looking for ways to work together and improve.
98. All of the Foundational Documents, source materials, supplementary reports, Commissioned Reports, research and policy documents, witness testimony, roundtables and other proceeding webcasts remain available on our website. They are there for you to use and talk about with your communities, coworkers, and networks.
99. Our progress has been made possible by the hard work of many people over the last two years. On behalf of the Commissioners, I would now like to share our unending gratitude. Know that I will never be able to name everyone, or make it clear with mere words how thankful we are to each and every one of you.
100. Starting with the families. Thank you for meeting with us early in our work in 2021 and again over the past few weeks, and for sharing your thoughts and experiences. We continue to extend our deep and lasting condolences for your losses and we share your dedication to making our communities safer in their memories.
101. Thank you to all the Participants and your counsel. You have all played a critical role in this inquiry, helping shape our approach, building the factual foundation, taking part in roundtables and other discussions, and sharing your submissions. You have put in long hours outside of proceedings and have been here with us during the many long days and weeks of public proceedings. Thank you.
102. Thank you to all the responders who were first on the scene during the mass casualty. Whether you are with the police, firefighters, emergency health or other civilian service

providers, we appreciate your courage and ongoing commitment to keeping people safe and helping them in times of hardship.

103. Thank you to the many witnesses and other people we heard from in interviews and during proceedings. We know it remains difficult for many to revisit the days during and after the mass casualty. Your recollections about what happened and perspectives on potential causes and recommendations have been instrumental to our work and we deeply appreciate it.
104. Thanks also to the many individuals who took part in the roundtables, small group sessions, consultations and other conversations. You have brought an incredible depth and breadth of expertise and experience to our work, shedding light on large and complex issues and helping us gather lessons learned and potential recommendations—including helping us think about making sure the final recommendations do not have disproportionate or unintended impact on disadvantaged or marginalized groups.
105. Thank you to the community organizations who met with the Commission team and helped us do our work in your communities, providing much needed supports and connecting us with necessary people and information.
106. Thank you to members of the media who have covered the Commission’s progress including public proceedings, helping the broader public stay engaged with our work. Many of you covered the mass casualty as it happened, and have been with us daily during proceedings. Independent and principled media is essential in ensuring the accountability of public processes such as ours and you have done this with dedication and care for those affected.
107. Thanks also to the many service providers who have helped to make our investigation and proceedings accessible to as many people as possible, assisting us with document management, technology, translation, interpretation, transcription, security, and many other services.
108. Thanks to the public here in Nova Scotia, in Canada, the United States and beyond, for your engagement and for taking part in our work. We are grateful to those of you who were able to join us in-person at proceedings, those of you who attended the open houses, and all of you who have engaged online, sent us emails, or called. So far, we have received over

200,000 unique visitors to the Commission website, over 350,000 views of our webcasts, and more than 360,000 file downloads, all of which speaks to strong public engagement.

109. Finally, thank you to members of the Commission team, including those of you working on investigations, Commission counsel, research and policy, mental health, secretariat and logistics, and communications and community engagement. You have worked days, nights, and weekends with unflinching dedication and care. Like the rest of the world, you kept going through COVID and shared in life's challenges as well as celebrations over the last two years – including isolation, illnesses, losses, weddings and births. We are so grateful to you and your families too, bringing care and concern for people to everything you have done. We truly could not have done this without your incredible commitment over the last two years.
110. Thank you *everyone* for stepping up. As we work toward completing and sharing the final report, we will call on all of you again to keep stepping up.
111. Community safety is a shared responsibility and a shared opportunity. We can all be—and need to be—champions for change, taking the recommendations and implementing them in our communities, workplaces and organizations. We have heard commitments from RCMP leaders and other institutional representatives that they will be open to the recommendations and are preparing to receive them. We are encouraged by these commitments, and call on policy makers, institutions, community groups and members of the public to take action based on the coming recommendations.
112. In conclusion, I too am honoured to have been asked to contribute and serve the public through this inquiry, and in particular to serve alongside Commissioners MacDonald and Stanton.
113. We Commissioners have been entrusted with a great responsibility and we will continue to do our utmost to live up to that as we prepare the final report. We call on all of you to live up to the responsibility as well, and to do everything you can to help implement the recommendations, making our communities safer for everyone.
114. Nous, les commissaires, nous sommes vus confier une grande responsabilité et nous continuerons de faire tout notre possible pour nous en acquitter. Nous vous appelons tous à être à la hauteur de vos responsabilités également et à faire tout ce que vous pouvez pour aider à rendre nos communautés plus sûres pour tous.

115. Merci.
116. Thank you.