MASS CASUALTY COMMISSION
COMMISSION DES PERTES MASSIVES

The Joint Federal/Provincial Commission into the April 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Casualty
MassCasualtyCommission.ca

Commission fédérale-provinciale sur les événements d'avril 2020 en Nouvelle-Écosse
CommissionDesPertesMassives.ca

Public Hearing

Audience publique

Commissioners / Commissaires

The Honourable / L'honorable J. Michael MacDonald,
Chair / Président

Leanne J. Fitch (Ret. Police Chief, M.O.M)

Dr. Kim Stanton

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Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

--- Upon commencing on Wednesday, September 13th, 2022, at 10:04 a.m.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Good morning, everyone. Bonjour et bienvenue. We join you from Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.

Thank you so much, Elder Marlene Companion from the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation, for your opening prayer and starting us off in such a good way. And Elder Companion, our thanks are extended not just for this morning but for being for us throughout our many difficult days. You were there when we started our proceedings in February and often throughout, and we are greatly indebted to you for being there for us. It really means a lot.

Please join us in remembering those whose lives were taken, those who were harmed, their families, including those here in Nova Scotia, across Canada, and in the United States, and all those affected by the April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia.

This week, we continue the final phase of our work focused on recommendations, recommendations that can help make our community safer. As we think about recommendations, we continue to draw on everything we have learned from earlier phases, earlier phases of our work where we looked at what happened, and how, and why it happened.

Our mandate includes focusing on individuals or groups who may have been differentially impacted by the mass casualty. Thus, our work will be greatly enriched by the input and participation from diverse voices and perspectives.

With those things in mind, today we are engaging with representatives from the Indigenous community. They are here to share their important suggestions and recommendations.

And the for the public, remember that you can also share suggestions for recommendations with us through the Commission's website, by phone,

or mail, and, as you think about potential recommendations, we encourage you to use the discussion guide and scan our prior -- and the scan of prior recommendations which are also available on our website.

I will now ask our co-facilitator, Ms. Cheryl Copage-Gehue, Indigenous Community Engagement Advisor for the Halifax Regional Municipality, to begin today's conversation. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you. As you mentioned, my name is Cheryl Copage-Gehue and I am the Indigenous Advisor for the Halifax Regional Municipality, and I also am a counsel member for Sipekne'katik First Nation.

I would like to take a second to honour some individuals we lost within our First Nations communities in these last few days. We've lost an outstanding, amazing elder, Margaret Poulette, Margaret Sylliboy from We'koqma'q, and Angie Sa'n from Eskasoni so our thoughts and prayers are with both of those communities as they go through this loss -- this tremendous loss in their communities.

I would also like to acknowledge that this event is taking place in Mi'kma'ki, our traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation.

I'm very honoured to be here today to facilitate this circle and I'd like to just go over a few of our little directions for while we're going through our circle.

So when we're doing our circle, I always want us to feel about our Seven Sacred Teachings. So before I go into that explanation, I'm going to do a quick round so everybody can introduce themselves here so we all know who's in the circle because one of the most important aspects about a circle is that we are all equal and that it's a safe space for everybody to share their thoughts and perspectives as we go forward.

Thank you, Elder.

So what I'm going to do while we're doing our format is that we're going to first do our round of introductions and I'm going to ask that each person

introduce themselves and what community they're from, and then we'll go around again after this and we'll talk a bit more before we go into actual talking about some of the issues.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Cheryl, thank you very much indeed. My name is Emma Cunliffe and I'm a settler who lives in the traditional ancestral and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish Nations on the West Coast of what we now know as Canada. And so I'm a visitor here in Mi'kma'ki.

I have the honour of serving as the Director of Research and Policy for the Mass Casualty Commission.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: Thank you. My name, of course, is Marlene Companion. I'm a mother, a grandmother, and a great grandmother. To some people, I'm considered an elder, and some people, I'm not. I am associated with the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre here in Halifax, and I belong to the Urban Elders Council here in Halifax, and I'm very privileged and honoured to be here throughout the Commission's time. Thank you.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: My name is Noel Brooks. I'm from Millbrook First Nation. I am the Manager of Community and Public Safety.

MR. LUKE MARKIE: My name is Luke Markie and I'm a security guard for Millbrook First Nation Community.

MR. JERID WATTON: My name is Jerid Watton. I am the Coordinator of Indigenous Outreach and Research for HRM and I'm also a member of Glooscap First Nation, and I want to thank the Commission for having us here today.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Good morning. My name is Commissioner Leanne Fitch. I'm from New Brunswick -- Fredericton, New Brunswick, and the Maliseet First Nation and Mi'kma'ki of New Brunswick and it's an honour to be here with you all today. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Thank you. My name is Michael MacDonald. I was born and raised in Whitney Pier, which is part of Sydney on Cape

Breton Island; and my grandfather was born in Soldier's Cove, which is a boundary to Potlotek First Nation. And my father made it very clear to me since I was a child to honour the Mi'kmaq and how helpful they were to his and my ancestors when they first arrived in Cape Breton. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Good morning. I'm Kim Stanton. I'm a guest here in Mi'kma'ki and I ordinarily reside in the territory shared by the Anishinaabe, Huron, Wendat, and Haudenosaunee peoples. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

I'm going to ask that we go back to the "Seven Sacred Teachings" slide. So whenever I facilitate sessions, I always like to ground the sessions within our Seven Sacred Teachings, which is honesty -- like, we want everybody to be honest and speak your truth, which is also another teaching of ours. And we want to have patience with others to understand what we're trying to express, so we want to give that respect, and respect each other's opinions.

One of the things with our Indigenous community is that we always like to exercise humility when we're sharing, and we're always there to love and support one another. And I want everyone to know that we all have wisdom, and what we're bringing to this circle is bringing your wisdom to the centre to bring it and share with the larger community and the Mass Casualty Commission. Thank you.

We'll go to the next slide. So I just want, before we start our circle, just to go over a little bit about our talking circle format that we have for today, which is our usual perspective when we're doing the circle.

So, when a person is talking in the circle, I will pass the feather along the line. When they are talking, this person talks until they're finished. They need to have that opportunity to say what they need to, articulate it, and the rest of our group here is not to interrupt the speaker or try talking across the circle. We want to respect that they have wisdom that they're bringing to the table here, and that we're going to have the patience and humility to understand and sit here and listen to what they're

process is bringing to us.

If, during the circle, at any time, you're not in a position or you don't feel like adding something, please don't feel like you have to. You can say, "I'm going to pass on this one" and then we'll come back to you the next round, because I know that a lot of these issues can be triggering, so we want to make sure that everybody is comfortable. So always that option is there.

This circle we will probably go multiple times because it's a fairly small circle, so we want to give everybody an opportunity to discuss issues as we go through. And as I said, sometimes there may be participants that will come after. We talked about this, and we're going to allow them to join our circle, and we'll be probably doing two, maybe three rounds during this circle to try and get as much feedback as we can from all those participants.

The other rule that we like to do within the circle is to respect everybody's voice that's in there. So what we say in this circle is what we're bringing here, and it's important that we're extremely respectful to everyone and their perspectives as they come to this table. And what they are saying has true value, and we want to make sure that we honour that as they're speaking.

So with that, maybe I'll just start off a little bit from my community perspective before I pass on.

So my community is Sipekne'katik First Nation, which was very close to where Constable Heidi -- the First Nation right next to the town of Sipekne'katik. So these events were very close to our community, where several of our community members lived -- literally the houses right from where the accidents were. So it's really important that I felt that somebody from our community come to the circle and share. I'll add more as we go along, but I'm going to pass it over to my co-facilitator here first.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you, Cheryl.

My thoughts today -- first of all, gratitude for those of you who have joined us, and I'm looking forward very much to learning from each of you today.

Secondly, with those who were unable to join us because of the losses in their communities, my thoughts are with them as they grieve and do the necessary work that a loss of that kind brings. And thirdly, with the James Smith Cree Nation, who have only just begun a journey that some in this room have been walking now for some time -- and I'm conscious of the salience of discussions of mass casualty for Indigenous communities having multiple dimensions, so I'm very grateful to each of you for coming to share today and grateful for the conversation that we'll have.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: Thank you. Today, I chose my very first eagle feather that I was able to obtain through Natural Resources, and the officer that gave me this eagle said, "It's not in very good shape." And I said, "It's perfect", and he said, "Well, I don't know what you're going to do with it." But it became a very valuable teaching tool for me, because it has a tail feather from a youngin, and unfortunately this eagle's demise was electrocution up in Shubie, where the big farm is, and also a goose from the Shubie River -- so a bird that flies high and a bird that flies low and a piece of deer antler.

People say, "You're an elder; you should carry something more grand." And I do: I carry my eagle fan. But today, I was called to bring this feather. And the teaching behind this feather is "not everything in this life is perfect". No matter how hard we try to do absolutely perfect, it's never absolutely perfect. And what people fail to realize is that they've done their best and they've said their best and they've shared their truths. And as people who have sat and walked and listened to the entire proceedings from start to finish, you've all done your best. It's absolutely perfect. You may be fringed along the edges and your hair may stand up on ends, but every single one of the people that are here have done their best, so it's perfect.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Elder.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: So we're saying we're here?

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Yeah.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: He stopped in our reserve. There's people

that were affected by it in our reserve. People lost people from our reserve -- one person. Yeah. That's why I'm here, I guess. I got invited.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

MR. LUKE MARKIE: I'm also here to put some insight and information and share some concerns and thoughts from people in our community, because just like all other communities, we've all been affected by this, and we need to find a way to work forward through it and show our respect for those who have lost and those that are still grieving for it, and hopefully find ways to prevent things from happening or at least minimize the outcome, as best as possible. Thank you.

MR. JERID WATTON: Well, my reserve was located in the valley pretty far from where this took place. The chief of our reserve, Glooscap First Nation, Chief Sidney Peters, lives up in that area, so when this happened, we all began to worry about him and his family. And I just wanted to come and share my thoughts and my feelings and share the respect for the people that this affected, and just show the breadth of how far this affected, that it wasn't just communities there; it was across Nova Scotia and Canada. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: I might be a little bit longer.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: That's fine.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: I'm here because -- to the Commission in general because I was asked. I had just retired from 34 years of policing, and I received a call to help with what was first the panel review in Nova Scotia, and when it switched to an inquiry, I stayed on. I'd given a lot of thought to taking on this role and responsibility even when it was a panel review, just coming out of retirement and still healing from a mass shooting in my own community in Fredericton, where we lost two citizens and two of my officers.

Those of you who are familiar with Fredericton, New Brunswick, know that the city has grown up around out First Nation community, which is in the heart of our city. And over the course of my career, I spent a lot of time patrolling and

meeting and developing relationships with what was then called St. Mary's First Nation -- now Sitansisk -- and developed a lot of learnings over the years. And when we suffered our own loss in Fredericton in 2018, that affected all of our communities right across the province but specifically I think those living in communities that make up the City of Fredericton. And I'm just honoured and so grateful that you've all chosen to join us here today. So I'm here for a number of reasons and just very very grateful to be in the circle. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you so much. I'm very grateful for everyone attending and sharing their insights which will be very important to our work. But Elder Companion, you reminded me of something that's been on my mind a lot. We often talk about the challenging days we have, and the difficult work and the difficult discussions. And I worry just how difficult it must be for those who have been most directly affected, the families of those of the lives taken, those injured, the traumatized first responders and so many who have been directly impacted.

And I worry about our process causing those most affected to relive and finding it very difficult. And I just want to keep reminding myself that as challenging we think our work is, it must be so much more challenging and difficult for all of those who have most directly affected to day in day out work with us. And we have to appreciate that so much to have their participation and knowing how difficult it must be is greatly appreciated.

And as I say, of course, a cause of concern for me that we will keep on doing our very best. Thank you..

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thank you.

One of the things that we're asked to do in our mandate is to consider how our work might affect people from different communities. And the subject of the Inquiry has a large focus on policing. And we live in a society that has a colonial history and a colonial reality, and that has created a situation where there are a

disproportionate impacts on Indigenous people with regard to the policing and laws and policies that we have in effect. And so given that we're asked to make recommendations with respect to areas that include policing, it's important for us to hear from folks to whom those recommendations are likely to apply and land more heavily in some ways in their implementation.

So we are very grateful to have voices joining us to help us to understand how to create recommendations that will be implemented in a way that doesn't cause unintended harms. So I'm very grateful to everyone for joining us for that purpose and also echo a number of the sentiments that have already been expressed, and in particular though being very conscious of unfortunately the relevance of our mandate, given the terrible events in Saskatchewan in the last couple of weeks and in the GTA yesterday. And we're mindful of the ongoing relevance of the work and the need to continue to do our best.to fulfill this mandate and do anything that we can to help to create safer communities.

Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Before we start this next round, we've had a participant join us virtually. I would like to take this opportunity to allow Clifford to introduce himself and say where he's from, and maybe provide, like, some perspective why you've come forward to be part of the Casualty Commission circle here.

MR. CLIFFORD PAUL: Hello, everybody. My name is Clifford Paul. I'm sorry I wasn't able to travel up. They had me doing some things right into later last night so I just decided I might as well join virtually.

So yeah, I come from Membertou. I've done some work in the past with policing and today I sit on the advisory -- the commanding officer's Mi'kmaq Advisory group with Nova Scotia, RCMP H Division. Also today I am the moose management coordinator for -- I work on behalf of the Assembly of Nova Scotia Chiefs through the Unama'ki Natural Resources.

But I was invited to be part of today's talks and discussions and I'm not saying I'm very keen on the processes but I know I have something to put that might be helpful.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Clifford. We're going to start our next round and then I'll call on you when it's your turn to speak. And we just went through some of the basic talking circle rules about respecting each other while each person speaks. They speak until they're done. And then really being attentive and allowing the person to speak that needs to have their voice heard.

It's great to see you, Clifford. I know I was up there last week.

So I'm going to start this round and I'm going to ask people to add if they want to build in a little bit more and tell more about their community's experience in more details, to be that voice for the community members that couldn't be here. And then maybe the next round -- or if you want to add in some of your recommendations that your community was thinking about or issues. We're going to allow this to more fluid and trying to address all of these kind of mandate questions that we have.

So within my First Nation, as I mentioned, I'm from Sipekne'katik First Nation. Our community was very close to the incident that happened with Heidi. And for most Indigenous communities a lot of our individuals are people -- they're lucky if they're on Facebook. They don't really go on Twitter or Instagram or any of those other mechanisms. So for many of us it wasn't until we seen posts on social media on Facebook that we started to figure out what was going on. We weren't really getting any advisory notifications. Our chief and council weren't notified that there were a potential incident happening that we should send a warning out to our community members.

So our community members were out driving around, going to Tim Horton's, getting coffees, going through the same intersection where it is. Our security guards weren't alerted. Like, everybody was in such a vulnerable section that day, and I just happened to be one of those people out driving around getting a coffee and I'd

come across a scene within my community where an individual needed police assistance. She was run over by a vehicle and there was a lot of interactions going on.

We were calling constantly for police to come and assist us, and there was none. We waited there for, I'd say, at least an hour or two with this individual who was run over by a car before we were able to contact. I reached out to my brother-in-law who's a volunteer firefighter and he called some of the local volunteer firefighters who came up to help us stabilize her until we were able to get somebody there to assist us.

And then when we did get somebody there to assist us, it was a police officer from another county who really had no clue where he was going, where he was going in the community. To be honest, he really wasn't much assistance to us in that day. If it wasn't for the volunteer firefighters that day that came and helped out when we called upon them through our mutual relationship with them, it may have been a different story for this woman that was hit by a vehicle while we were dealing with this.

And as I mentioned, we have two families that live right at the bottom of the hill where Heidi's accident happened. And the young children were playing outside and went running in. And it was like, "Mom, Mom, there's a fire. There's a fire."

So how easily -- because there's a public park there where the children play all the time -- for one of our community members to be affected. And we also talk about there's a new Mi'kmaq emergency alert system and all I've see so far come out is a flyer with a Q code saying, "Oh, register if you want to get alerts."

I think there needs to be more work done from our community perspective to make sure that our Indigenous people are getting these alerts and they are needed.

I'm going to speak on a number of different topics because I've also, as a First Nations councillor -- but I've also worked for may years within the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association in the Women's Sector and about the vulnerability

of our Indigenous women. Our Indigenous women go missing at much higher rates. We've had incidents within our community where a community member has gone missing and even in our urban community here for, I think it was like 18 days or 16 days where there was nothing, no notification, no flyer, no anything gone out. And I hate to say this, but I almost feel like it was because she was a dark complexed Indigenous person compared to a lighter complexed Indigenous person. And she wasn't a university student. She was a person that was out on the street that didn't have as much of a circle around her to advocate for her.

So it wasn't until we started really pushing the media. And actually we had to go speak to the Halifax Women's Commission and ask them for assistance to help us get more information out about our missing and murdered women. And then it happened to be on International Women's Day. And that was the only way we had got media coverage for this young woman that was missing in Halifax. Luckily she was found, but it could have been a much worse turnout for our women.

So those are just a couple of thoughts that came to my head into perspective with this, and I'm sure more will come in my head as we go along.

But I'd like to pass it over to you now.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Cheryl, thank you very much for sharing your perspective and some of your reflections. I think this is a round where it's appropriate for me to listen.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: I know that in the urban community when this first happened, people were in shock. They didn't know what to say. And many of the people that hang out at the Friendship Centre and various groups, universities and whatever, don't really understand the geography of Nova Scotia and didn't realize how close it was to the urban centres.

After things began to settle down a little bit, people began to chatter and chatter and I head a conversation with some women and elders of urban Halifax and the thing tht was most prevalent is, "What happens to the children?" Like what do

we -- or what is the Commission and what is the government going to do about the children?

We know from firsthand experience what generational trauma is. And although it's been years and years, the children that aren't even born yet are gong to feel the effects of this situation, this mass murder. I'm not quite sure if anyone has thought of that but those unprotected babies that aren't even born have got to have something in place for them so they don't end up like the majority of people on reserves that are young people going to university; they're still suffering from residential school. And residential school has been closed.

So that's what I'm hearing in the urban centre. It's still talked about very quietly. There's -- I don't think that we've had anything at the Friendship Centre or elsewhere as a way to do prayers and make some offerings and to bring people who are feeling the effects of this into circle with us. Maybe that's something that we could consider.

Yeah, the children, future children is one of the concerns.

Thank you.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: The day that it happened I was home with my family. My wife told me. She was on Facebook; that's how we found out. I want to say it was probably wintertime when we started rolling out our emergency broadcast system. We used Everbridge CMM compares to Mainland Mi'kmaq offered to help us create this. We use it now. We have a lot of people joined up. It works. We have missing people in our community posted.

But yeah, on our reserve we had a lot of RCMP officers affected by it. That's probably our biggest problem right now is lack of RCMP officers because a lot of them are not allowed on duty. I know there's still quite a few people that are still haven't came back to work but, like, that day there was so many people driving around. There was still people outside. I kind of just locked my door and stayed inside with my family.

That's about it.

MR. LUKE MARKIE: So a lot of people talk about the day. The night -- it happened that night, the night before. I was doing security when the first thing happened of my community. So I was patrolling around my community and had no idea that something happened that close to my community. And I had no idea that this person was still at large. It wasn't until the next day when I was out working and stuff that I got a notification through a friend of the family, like family members and friends saying, "Hey, that incident last night wasn't a select incident. There's somebody on the loose."

Like, there was no public notification given to anybody until after And being somebody who works alongside with the RCMP as much as I do, like, I see them on a regular basis every shift, and at night I could have pulled -- I could have stopped to talk to this guy thinking he was a police officer, right? I might not be here today if he would have rolled through my community that night. Luckily for me it wasn't until the mid-day or the early morning the next day he stopped at a gas bar close by and changed outfits.

We had people going in and out of that gas bar. We had people driving up and down the street. Nobody knew. So possibly having something in the near future of alerting people sooner, maybe contacting people of authority or people that have higher responsibility in the community first. Like, I understand everybody needs to know as soon as this happens. But if you alert the guy that's out doing it, we're looking for him, he's going to get more likely hide.

So I think there should be like a trickle down authorities and then base out. And then our community needs to know as soon as possible. That there's somebody of this severe danger roaming our community and stuff like that.

And as for afterwards, like Noel said, RCMP officers have been affected so a lot of them aren't around. We don't have a set, like a real PTSD centre. So if anybody is struck by something traumatizing -- it could be anything. Like the elder

said, from residential schools to this mass shooting to any trauma within your family, we don't have a centre where people can go and feel safe and let it out, tell people, like, "This is what I'm going through."

So having more places for people or more engagement for people like that, that might also help people who have been affected by this tragedy to have a safe place to, like, come and feel comfortable and just let it out. Some people can't even cry because of this. We just need places, more community engagement and stuff like that. And I feel like having centres at the right places would really really help for community outreach and stuff like that. So thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

MR. JERID WATTON: So like many people, our community, myself included, I found out about this incident over Facebook. We heard from many of our community members that this wasn't helpful. This wasn't good enough for them. They still felt like they were in danger when they found out this way.

After that, our community began discussing how can we prevent this from happening? How can we keep our community more informed? And since then we've tried on multiple occasions to develop an alert system which we're still working on today. And I think having both internal community alert systems and also having those connected to a larger external communications system would be extremely helpful. It's something that we very much need, especially in some of our more isolated communities. For our community, it takes at least half an hour to an hour for even one police car to get there. A lot of the time they get lost because they know us as Horton 35 but, when people call, we say Glooscap First Nation, so we have confusion on that.

So I think by having a larger alert system and having clear communication about location, or even just, I guess, giving people a better general understanding of the geography, which I know can be hard -- it's a lot of education behind that -- but I think those are definitely areas we need to look at if we want to try

and prevent this from happening in the future or at least minimize any effects this could have. Yeah.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Excuse me. Before we go on, I'm going allow our participant online -- Clifford, would you like to add some?

MR. CLIFFORD PAUL: Sorry, I just unmuted myself. No, we're watching from afar here in Cape Breton. Unama'ki. We felt it for friends and relations up in Halifax, Millbrook, all those areas affected, you know, where the incidents occurred. And, you know, me and my friends, we have relatives that work for RCMP and have worked for Shubenacadie, Millbrook, Pictou Landing, and other detachments, not just on the reserves, so we were very, very astounded, really, that a lot had occurred before the public was informed.

And I know we have a really nice alert system with the Mi'kmaq community. Had we had gotten an alert or a message, I know that our coordinators are right on top of those things so it's easy to say -- speak like that after the fact, you know, but that's why we're talking today.

I know Covid prevented us from getting together to debrief. Community members, especially in Millbrook, who had such close contact with the potentiality for more casualties were high there and I think -- I think, as other participants have said, we needed avenues, and venues, and elders, and communities to come together to deal with the immediate grief, to de-escalate what was happening in our own minds, I guess, that debrief, and that was very important.

I think Covid prevented that, too, at that time, because we couldn't really gather as much as we could have or should have, so I'm hopeful that discussion will -- discussions, actually, and input from our community members will inform people that, you know, we're there. We feel it. It's heavy on our souls, and it will always be continual heavy on our souls, you know, because it's a disaster and it's something that's going to take a while to just deal with the facts and information. And I think we need out healer, our elders, and our pipe carriers to assist us and assist the RCMP, not just the

members, the civilian members as well. Like, I speak with them. They're very important in that -- in that -- in their roles -- and that we're able to come together and see how we can press forward, I guess, for the -- for the better safety of our people and our officers.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Clifford.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Thank you. I was -- I remember the day well, like all of us, I'm sure, do. I was actually down in my barn on Sunday morning at about 8:00 or 8:30 and having a coffee and listening to CBC news, as I often do on Sunday mornings, and started to hear about the details as they were coming in through media.

And my father was born and raised in Nova Scotia. His family had been here for a couple of generations and he was -- started out in Parrsboro so I'm familiar with the land. I have extended family and immediate family still living here in Nova Scotia, including in Pictou County, so one of my first calls was with my mother to find out where my sister was because we knew that she liked to walk country roads with friends. I hope she doesn't mind that I'm sharing that today. And so we had concern for immediate family.

And before that, just in hearing the turmoil that was unfolding, I just -- I felt my heart just -- it felt like it shattered all over again and my thoughts went immediately to the families in Fredericton, and our officers and civilian members on the force, and the police agencies that helped us during August of 2018, and just knowing the wounds that that would be opening for so many people and our community at large, and it felt really overwhelming, the emotion of it.

And when I answered the last question as to, you know, why am I here today, and I said it was because I was asked, I was asked to help to bring those experiences forward to the work of the Commission in hopes of making a difference going forward and helping people manage through what I knew would be a very, very difficult and lifelong journey. So that's where I was and that's why I'm here. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Thank you. I appreciate so

much the -- the input and important perspectives so far and would -- of course, I'm here to learn as much as I can and hear as much as I can and, you know, I'm -- we are hearing a lot of common themes, not just around this circle but in all our work, and I very much appreciate that. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thank you. One of the things that we're asked to look at is the relations between police forces, different forces, and so it's helpful to hear about how your communities interface with the different police forces around where you live and how the RCMP are engaged in your community or not, and what might be helpful in terms of the -- one of things we're looking at is the structure of policing in Nova Scotia so just thinking about -- we've had some discussion of the Marshall Inquiry recommendations and the degree to which they have or have not been implemented, some of which were around recommendations for Indigenous police forces, and that's a call that's been heard again over the last week out of Saskatchewan, and just would be interested to hear about if people have thoughts on the structure of policing in Nova Scotia as it related to Indigenous communities.

And Cheryl, I just want to acknowledge as well that id addition to -- in addition to Cst. Heidi Stevenson of Shubenacadie Circle, the life of Joey Webber was taken there as well and I just want to make sure we acknowledge that as well. So thank you very much.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you. And not to overlook Joey Webber, but that's also a very common root that our Indigenous people go there because they fish along the banks and it was almost optimal fishing season there. So we fish all along that area where Joey was -- lost his life. And the most commonly used physician we have is just literally the next driveway from where Joey had passed.

But I wanted to kind of build on a few more things, like, I'm hearing from the conversation, I know when I'm in a circle, when I hear other people talk, I'm thinking, oh, yes, I would raise that point, and it kind of builds off of that. So I'd like to kind of build off of what each of you have said a little bit and then go back again around

the circle and see if there's more that you want to add in, if there's more recommendations that you thought would be perspectives from your community that would be really valuable.

So, once I heard from our circle here was about the remoteness of a lot of our communities. There's only two really urban communities that are within, like, a city structure, and that's Membertou and Millbrook First Nation. And they both have relationships, not only with the RCMP, but also with the municipal police system.

And our Halifax urban community, there's a relationship with the HRP, the Halifax Regional Police, but there's not a lot of Indigenous content, I find, within either of the organizations about creating more cultural awareness, more understanding about the Mi'kmaq communities, more understanding about even the dynamics and the logistics and how everything operates within our First Nation community.

I'll speak from my experience here within the city. When we are doing recruitment, it's extremely difficult to get Indigenous people to apply for RCMP or regional police positions, and that probably comes from the long historical mistrust through inter -- through generational trauma, because it was traditionally those people in authority like that that came and took our children away to residential schools. So that perspective, I always keep in mind, like, when I'm trying to increase recruitment.

But the other perspective is that we expect these officers to do maybe a two-day a week-long training in Indigenous culture and customs and protocol and expect them to be efficient and culturally aware, and that is not the case. As an Indigenous person, I'm continuously learning more about our culture and traditions every day, and I live it immensely. I'm involved in it, right, every day in my community and in my work sector, and it's a lifelong, ongoing journey to really truly get that cultural competency that we all stride towards. And as an Indigenous person, I'll say I am not anywhere near completely culturally competent. I am continuously learning about ceremonies that were lost through residential school. I'm relearning my language

because that was lost. And there's so many aspects of our culture that we -- do we really expect these individuals who are part of our community to understand unless they had the opportunity to live and be there in the community?

And most of our detachments are now -- the officers don't live in the community or they're not from the community, and as Jerid was saying, it could take, like, up to 20 to half an hour to 45 minutes for them to come for any call, and there's also mandates that even the ambulance or that can't come to a scene without having a police officer there. So in my community, I know they're sitting at the end of the community waiting for all of these backup while these individuals who are in trauma, we're trying to do our best to keep them stable or calm or until they have -- until they follow their protocols and get a police escort or something like that to be there.

So those are issues that I find really big. And the other one is that there's no designated person within our First Nations community. Noel, you're the first person I heard who's a public safety officer, which I think is amazing, and I think that's a gap in all of our First Nations communities. We have emergency preparedness, but their focus is more on preparing for a flood or power outage or dealing with a hurricane or tornado or those kind of natural disasters.

And COVID was big learning for them because our emergency preparedness officers ended up taking a lot of that work on in collaboration with their health facilities. We don't have anybody who's a public safety advocate within our community to ensure things like this don't happen within our First Nations communities like it did out west. And that was a huge, open -- wide open thing when that happened to the community, to see that that thing happened. It wasn't a gun, it was a stabbing. It was somebody who was going door to door, where most of our First Nations people don't even lock our doors. Our doors are open because it's our family coming over. The children are running in and out of the house. How easily -- we've just seen that can happen.

I also wanted to acknowledge that our urban community isn't like a

First Nations community, and Emma will speak about it. We don't have designated communities like a settlement where our Mi'kmaq, I think. We're splattered through all out the cities. Even though we have reserves or reserve lands here in the city, there are few people to live there, but most of our urban community is splattered throughout the city, and their only focal point is the Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre. So we really need to make sure that the Friendship Centre in our urban community is looked after as well, because there's a huge -- more than half of our population in the Indigenous communities here in Nova Scotia is in an urban setting, either in Halifax or the Sydney area.

So it's so important that we take care of our Indigenous people on and off reserve and make sure that that's there as well.

The relationship with policing, I touched on it a bit. We have so many First Nation police officers who are extremely triggered by this, and many of them are still healing from this and other things within their communities. And we need to find ways that provide support for our Indigenous police officers, because there's so much. And I always hear directly from them. The hardest thing that they ever have to do is policing their own communities because it's not just Timmy down the road or that, that's somebody that they knew, grew up with, were friends with, know the family, the interconnection with the communities. And in Mi'kma'ki here, especially in Nova Scotia, all of our communities are fairly small, and we pretty much know everybody from every other community, so it doesn't matter what community they're going to get placed within or that, they have the relationship. It's a cousin of a cousin or they grew up or friends went to school. So it's really important that we look at that relationship with police in it and figure out ways on how we can make sure there's more Indigenous content, and I don't want it just to be a week-long training. It has to be more. It has to be really getting -- and I always to many people, for many of them, I just had a talking circle on the Shubenacadie River bank Sunday evening, and we had four police officers from the local detachments come out. And for many of them, even participating in a blanket

exercise was the first time they learned a lot about the history, about all of the things and Acts such as centralization, the gender bias within the Indian Act, how these all affect our communities today, right now, still. These Acts that were started and created before Canada was even a country are still affecting our Indigenous community.

And they were very thankful and humbled because this was not a learning that they learned, even in all of their Indigenous training. These were things that they didn't know perspectives from.

So with that, I'm going to pass it on, and maybe if you want to raise more things?

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you so much, Cheryl.

I would like to share some things that we've heard in other parts of our proceedings, because I'm very interested to hear the thoughts of those in the circle today about them.

Last week we had the honour of hearing from Heidi Marshall and Jane McMillan about the history of the Marshall Inquiry, and Commissioner Stanton alluded to this, and those recommendations which have been implemented and those which have not.

And in particular, that led to a discussion of the Unama'ki Tribal Police Service, which I understand was not a direct recommendation of the National Inquiry, but which was implemented through the advocacy of the Mi'kmaq in the weight of that inquiry, but which really only lasted about five years.

And Heidi and Jane shared some perspectives on the ways in which, as they articulated, the Unama'ki Tribal Police Service had been set up to fail, had been underfunded, and that to a certain extent, had become the victim of some aspects of it turned success because the culturally competent model of policing that it implemented was so much in demand that that demand massively outstripped the capacity of the police officers to meet that demand.

And so against the backdrop of that conversation, Noel and Luke,

I'm very interested in the work that you do in Millbrook as public safety and security providers. And you mentioned working -- working closely with the Millbrook RCMP Detachment, and the personal challenges, of course, and the deep challenges that have been presented by the involvement of members of that detachment in their response on April 18 and 19, 2020.

But I'm also interested in the broader context of the work you're doing in all-around public safety, and how you're imagining that.

Another really important conversation we have had in the recommendations phase is the idea that policing is only one out of what some used the metaphor of an ecosystem of community safety, that the community safety is delivered first and foremost by community members to one another, but that by many other service providing organizations, whether they be health organizations, whether they be folks like Noel and Luke doing the work that you're doing, whether it be education and the work that is done through the education system.

And so some of the ideas I think that we've heard from others are around questions around whether -- if we -- if we strengthen the community safety net in other ways, do we possibly also address some of the challenges that we see in policing? And so those are some ideas I wanted to share that we have heard so far and that we'd be very interested to hear, in turn, from each of you about.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: So where my job is where -- working with the RCMP, there's things, I guess, I don't want to -- like, what problems I see, things I think they could change. I don't think I could share this here just because it's not -- it's being recorded, right. So if you guys ever want to talk where we aren't and we can talk where it's just us ---

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Yes.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: --- I have no problem telling you guys how I do it.

But, basically, Millbrook's -- Millbrook's Security is going to be -- they are -- is the liaison between RCMP and Millbrook community -- the Millbrook community members. So we get a lot of -- right now, because of the casualty, we have a lot of RCMP officers coming in from other places for overtime. They don't know the community that good. They don't know where they're going. They don't know nobody. So we provide that input with them saying, "Yeah, this person can be this. This person can be that. Their name is this. There's probably these many people in the house." We provide backup once in a while, not too much, but we do provide backup.

Luke will be better off explaining because he actually is out on the road with them, but my end goal -- one of my end goals -- there's multiple different endings I see for this. I'm working on different ones as we go along to see which one fits Millbrook but I like the idea of what Moncton just did. If no one knows, like, they have their bylaw officers with their police officers now so they're together as one. That was pretty -- that's kind of one of -- that's a nice end goal. It seems like it would work, a Millbrook community with an RCMP officer. But yeah, that's one of them.

If you guys ever want to talk other than this about it, I have no problem discussing it with you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Noel.

MR. LUKE MARKIE: So as Noel said, with security, we work alongside of the RCMP, so a lot of us get to know the on-duty officer on a more personal level. We get to stop; we get to talk, just shoot -- shoot the crap of their day, our day, how their shift's going, how our shift's going. If they -- if they have any questions or concerns about somebody, they may not understand -- like, they might not personally know, which is a lot of the case because, like Noel said, we've got a lot of non-local community members working right now because of this, so we have other people coming in. So they'll be like -- for example, they'll say, "Oh, we have an incident up the road we're going to at this address. Do you have any intel or insight on that for us?" And we can say, "This is this person's house. Chances are, it'll be a walk in the

park. You've just a got a noise complaint." Or I can say, "Hey this person has a history of violence. You might want to get backup and go ahead."

I would say over 75 to 80 percent of all calls from our community members are directed to security first because we are from the community. We are within the community. We know everybody. And like what was stated before, there's that past traumatization of authority figures removing our children and stuff from our communities and stuff like that so that's still -- that still hits home pretty hard to a lot people and a lot of our elders so they're more likely to call someone like me that they do know, or one of our workers that's like a nephew, or an uncle, or cousin, or whatever, and they'll be like, "Hey, like, there's possibly this situation going on," and then we will alert the RCMP after that because we're not necessarily hands on unless we -- it's like an emergency -- like, incident emergency, we're right there. :Like, we trying not to be -- we try to let the authorities do their job as much as possible.

It's harder when we don't know the officers because the officers don't know us so sometimes they won't stop and ask for assistance. They won't ask. They'll just go in full tilt and that's -- that affects our community members on a psychological level as well. So having -- I think having an intermediate, more or less, I guess is what you could call us, between the community and the RCMP help.

I believe more community-engaged events with RCMP or your local police officers within your community, whether it's a game of pickup ball, or volleyball, or some sport, or an event where you have your officers doing a cookout or a BBQ and the community members can come in, and if your community members get a chance to meet the officers out of uniform as -- more or less as a person as opposed to an authority, that's where you'll bridge the gap of that broken trust I feel that we get a lot of from within Indigenous communities. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

MR. JERID WATTON: I think I may pass on this question. I don't really have as much experience working with the RCMP as the other individuals in this

group. But thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Clifford, would you like to add in? You're on mute, Clifford.

MR. CLIFFORD PAUL: Yeah, I have so much to talk about because I did work for the Unama'ki Tribal Police 1995 to 2000, six years, and I seen a lot. And I -- you know, I've -- I seen the best at their best, the worst at their worst, and vice versa, and I'm very happy that our -- some of our members in this circle did here from Heidi Marshall and Dr. Jane McMillan because the -- and I will use this as an example -- because institutional racism, it's not just within entities such as the RCMP but the Department of Justice, the court systems, and all these things that our people are -- experience in this world. And I have a lot of horror stories in that relationship.

But, you know, PTSD is unrecognized for a lot of these members who did not join the RCMP and, for them to get help, they need these -- what's that number RCMP had all the time? You have to have that, like, membership number, and some of our members didn't -- you know, seen incredible things happen in, you know, that short period of time. You need a regiment number, I think it is, or something like that. I forget the number. I was talking to a member who did not join the RCMP when we shut down. But really, it all -- racism got us there to set up this police force, and racism killed it. And we were basically set up to fail.

You know, the Marshall Inquiry was out. We've had researchers study the incarcerations of First Nations' people in prisons in Canada. We have five to 10 times family-violence rates. We have suicide rates that are well beyond the norm. We have sexual assaults and all these other crimes, five to 10 times the national average. And Unama'ki Tribal Police was set up as a recommendation from the Marshall Inquiry and that was a great moment for Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Justice to say, "Let's wrong this right this way," and yet the Tribal Police Force was grossly underfunded, and I'll give you a good example.

We have a 15-member force. That's members. That's not counting

civilian members -- a 15-member force to police five First Nation communities and the funding was $1.15, almost $1.2M, and the training budget alone was $10,000 for all that -- all those members.

And we've had RCMP auditors come in and they looked at the files. Of course, it reflected exactly what was going on in First Nation communities. And I remember one of the auditors saying, "The only reason why this Force is surviving is because of the love our police had for policing their own communities."

And I've talked with several people and the relationship between our Mi'kmaq negotiators and the Department of Justice was basically -- "Here's your chance. Take it or leave it." And of course we took it.

And now you have all these members; some of them joined the RCMP and I remember because they were kids, they're younger than me, they joined the RCMP and now they're all retired, so the kids are retired, right? And we have unresolved issues with the Department of Justice and I'm glad Dr. Jane McMillian had conversations with some of these people because that's the 1990s now. We're supposed to be beyond when I grew up in 1960 Sydney, Nova Scotia, how racist that is, and how racist the treatment was for my cousin, Donald Marshall Jr., you know. I was just a kid in 1971.

But it's incredible that the relationship has much more to bloom, I guess, for it to be properly instituted and properly -- you know, the Marshall Inquiry was big then. That was big stuff. I wish -- I wish our members -- I wish the Tribal Police and other things that's supposed to have spawned from the Marshall Inquiry had been given the energy it deserved which did not occur.

I think today it's not my job to ask people, "What do you think of policing in your community?" It's not my job. But people are telling me, "Bring back the Tribal Police."

My uncle Dana Joe was the first to jump off the ship. He saw those rough waves and he went right to Sipekne'katik. And he was so well respected in that

community because I remember the Shubie people says, “Oh my God, there’s a Tribal Police guy coming here.” It was my Uncle Dana. You know, I'm from Membertou, and if you're from the res you have uncles and aunts younger than you because you babysat them. Well, Dana is one of them, you know. He’s younger than me; he’s my uncle. He can get away with calling me Guiz because I respect the man as an uncle.

So he’s just one. And there are many that, you know, that worked. We were so under-funded. And I’m not going to lie to you. My pay, doing Criminal Records Management and police dispatching, my pay was $19,600. It was the lowest ever, I ever earned in my life, working for the Tribal Police.

And Membertou Welfare had to supplement my income so that I could work. And I don’t know why I stayed with that money but it made me a better human being because I was able to deal professionally with the fallouts of residential schools. I was able to understand that our people are sick and that alcohol and drug abuse are one the bad casualties of the residential schools and the institutional racism. I seen a lot. And I learned a lot. So at that work made us, all of us that worked there, better human beings.

But man, we were sad to see it go down because that was Police Chief John Leonard Tony’s dream to set up a Tribal Police force. And I wish it was the dream of the Department of Justice as well. Maybe they would still be policing their communities. Maybe the Mi'kmaq language would be brought into homes where you have to de-escalate situations and a simple word like “Meskey” or “wele’g”, settle down -- you know what I mean? That goes a long way.

So I think I have a lot to say but I’ll keep it at that.

The relationship is institutional. The attitudes are old. And the studies have been done. Let’s move forward and let’s work in meaningful ways so that our communities get the best policing and our officers get the best protection. You know, they work hard, man. They’re heroes. So all the guys I worked with and the women that I worked with are heroes.

Yeah. I'm getting emotional, so I better take a sip of my coffee and then I'll leave it at that. I know that's a lot.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Wela'lin.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Thank you. I'm very grateful to have some unique experiences to be able to share from policing in Fredericton for over three decades. So some of my stories -- you know, I hear you talk about the good stories and the bad stories that you've witnessed and I can assure you from a policing perspective I have seen some very bad policing in St. Mary's over the course of my career.

When I first started with force we had three First Nations members of the police force. And they were assigned to the reserve. And so this was in the early eighties. And I worked on the north side of the river for a long time so I spent a lot of time with these three officers while working. And back then, members of the police force wouldn't go up on reserve to answer a call without backup.

And our three First Nations officers, they didn't work 24/7. But the arrangement was terrible. They lived in the community, families were in the community. They would be disciplined by the police organization if they were off reserve, so if they went off reserve to back a member up. They didn't have opportunity for promotion. They didn't have opportunity to work in specialized units. And it was really really hard on them.

Now, that evolved over time and with the advent of community policing in the 1980s there started to be a rotation of officers assigned to reserve and we would try to have the same people there for two to three years because it was important to build those relationships. And this also gave our First Nations officers other opportunity to work in other areas and other divisions as well.

But initially it was such a difficult setup for them, and I just had such respect for how they managed and lived in the community. Over the course of time, relationships improved; by no stretch is it perfect. But it is something that I think both the First Nation community and our officers have grown over the years. But there's

always room for improvement.

We were fortunate to -- I don't know if I started out by saying that I think of Fredericton and St. Mary's have -- I think it's only one of maybe three quadripartite agreements in all of Canada where a municipal agency provides police service. But it's interesting; I remember on day having a conversation with Chief Candace Paul some years ago and we were talking about community policing and she said, "You know, back in the -- when this all started with this community policing nobody asked us if we wanted community policing. They just started doing community policing to us, which is not community policing."

And you know, this was just a few years ago when we just have so much more to grow and to learn and to build those relationships. So I'm only speaking from my experience that I think is relative to our conversation today. And I just want to say that after -- well, prior to, but also after our shooting in Fredericton in August of 2018, members of First Nations provided our first responders with a sweat lodge. So, we were very honoured to participate in sweats both prior to just as we had been working on our relationship, but also the care that they showed us in the aftermath. So I just wanted to share that and give a public thanks for that as well.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Thank you. One of the outcomes of the mass casualty was damage to the trust in our institutions. Not just our policing institutions but all our institutions suffered a trust deficit because of it, so I see today as a real opportunity because you all are experts in what it takes to build back trust, and you have such an important perspective to help us in coming up with recommendations to build back trust. And I'm not at all suggesting that the trust has been built back, but you are certainly experts in experiences that have resulted in a lack of trust, so I see a real opportunity to learn about what could be done to build back trust. And I'm hearing some themes develop, one of which of course is being part of the community and taking the uniform off and whatnot. So that's very helpful because you are certainly experts in that field. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thank you. The themes that I'm hearing as well are with respect to the importance of relationships and also how to have a response that is appropriate to the situation. And so it may not be that police are the first people to call and that, actually, having community partnerships, community relationships that create the knowledge and the knowledge base, the competency, to be able to say, "Here's what I know about this family or this part of the community, and here's why perhaps the first person to go in that door ought not to be a police officer but a person who can speak to the folks there in a way that will de-escalate the situation" -- but trying to sort out how to ensure that those relationships are built and that people in the community who have that knowledge get the call to be able to share that information is part of the challenge, I think, in terms of how to structure things in a way that helps everyone, including officers, whose safety, of course, is also part of the picture.

So just a very important part of it is figuring out how do you have those partnerships. How do you make them sustainable, because we're hearing a lot about the community agencies that have a lot of competency but no stable funding? And so to be able to ensure that they're available and able to provide the information and knowledge that would assist in any of these situations is part of the picture as well. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you. So I'm going to do one more round, because I realize that this can be very heavy and it does bring back a lot of emotions for us. But I wanted to talk a little bit more about some of the topics I hear. Like I said, when I hear other people talk, it makes me think of things and I'm like, "Yes, I need to bring this up."

So one of the things I talk about a lot is colonial organizations, and that's very much what our police structures are. And our municipalities, our government -- everybody is a very colonial organization. And I remember when I was hiring for Jerid, developing questions with our HR, I wanted to ask them very specifically, "Do you think, as an Indigenous person, you will be able to work within a colonial structure,

because it is very different than working within your First Nations communities?" And I really thought HR was going to come back and tell me, "Are you crazy? You're not asking that question." But they let me go with it, because I didn't want to bring somebody into the organization that was not going to be able to thrive and experience their Indigeneity -- their Indigenous identity -- within the organization, that they would feel sequestered. And I didn't want that. I wanted to make sure that they were strong enough that they felt that they can figure out a way to get through these colonial organizations to really make a difference and change for communities.

And I think there needs to be work done at all levels to really start looking at these institutions and organizations -- the justice, policing. Even the way our government interacts with us, it's very paternalistic, that "We know what's right for you." And as was said earlier, it wasn't asked if you needed community policing; it was put upon you. There's that real need for really developing a strategy that deals with how they're going to dismantle some of these structures that are so restrictive, and it can be so frustrating at times.

I've had organizations -- that says, "As an Indigenous person coming into the organization, we're going to pay you this because you do so much work on reserve and it's tax-free." But your equivalent non-Indigenous person gets paid a higher salary because they have to pay taxes. How is that even allowed? It's discrimination, but it happens a lot within organizations and structures because they feel, because of an act that was created by governments and dictated to us, that we have a different taxation sector, that they feel that they have the right to impose -- pay us less than what we're worth compared to a non-Indigenous person.

I also wanted to talk about -- we have so many research projects done, so many recommendations, but there is nobody designated to do the work or to implement them, and there's no designated funding to do them. When you do these research studies and that -- like, we have UNDRIP, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people. We have the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

recommendations. We have the Marshall Inquiry recommendations. We have the missing, murdered Indigenous women recommendations. All of these things have really valuable recommendations, but there's nobody designated to do them. You expect people to do -- or our Indigenous communities to do this off the side of their hats and implement them, when a lot of the structure and change needs to happen at this colonial level. You have the funding to help do these supply positions for the Native women, who can work specifically on implementing these recommendations, but also the funding to go to support the work in a continuous function and continuity.

And that's what I was hearing with the policing. Like, we created these tribal police. It was great, but there wasn't equivalent funding because we were probably on reserve and they figured, "Oh, they're on reserve. We'll pay them less; we'll give them less money." We don't get the same training budgets. We don't get all these items.

We talked about community and actually having them being more engaged and truly becoming allies to the communities that they work with. I teach a course called Allyship, and one of the things I always tell them: "Have you ever been out to a First Nation?" And they're like, "No, I haven't. I don't know the correct words to say. I'm worried to put my foot in my mouth, or what if I say the wrong word and all this stuff?" So I help get them comfortable to be going out to do that. And I'll take the words from an esteemed colleague of mine. He says he brings his students out to the community and he tells them, "Do you see that line?" And they're like, "No, there's not." And he goes, "Exactly. There is no line. There is no boundary stopping anybody from coming into a First Nations community. Everybody is welcome in our first communities. You're probably going to meet the nicest people, because you come into our community, we're not going to let you leave without feeding you tea or feeding you food or engaging with you. We'll welcome you in our house." And as I mentioned earlier, a lot of us don't even close the door -- or lock the door in our communities. So it's important to really focus on building allyship amongst our individuals.

One of the other things I wanted to talk about is a lot of people don't realize they have an unconscious bias -- and that's another course I train people in -- because you think, "Oh, I'm not racist. I don't have this." But your unconscious bias says something different. And I recently had an incident with a very high-ranking judge within Nova Scotia who was at a trial for an Indigenous person, and gets a call and just gets up and leaves while this Indigenous person is testifying. "Oh, I've got to go take care of this murderer." He said that, walked out, and doesn't realize how connected we are within communities. So I automatically knew because I heard about they were looking for a First Nations individual in the Truro area, I knew exactly who they were looking for. And even though he didn't say, he didn't -- said it unconsciously, his bias, that, for me, sent a strong message that he believed that this Indigenous person was guilty because he called him a murderer before he even had trial.

And then when I called him out on his bias at a talking circle later, after the trial had happened, he automatically got defensive. "Oh, you don't know how much I do for the First Nations community. I have done this to help this person and this person and this person."

That's your token Indianism. Like, that's the take your picture with a person from African descent. "I'm not racist. I have an African Nova Scotian friend."

And we get that a lot. So there needs to be more done with this unconscious bias, and that they need to really look at this implementing throughout all of the system, because a judge may think he's not racist, but you're saying things that are showing that you are. Actions speak much louder than words, at times.

One of the other things I wanted to really touch on before we go is, our Mi'kmaq language. And as Clifford was saying, sometimes it's just that (Native word), like, "What's the matter," to us, like, that calms you down, and our language has so much power in it. And now that we have the Nova Scotia Act, there should be opportunities where more of our police officers -- you're required to learn French -- in Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaq is going to be the official language of Nova Scotia. Why aren't

our officers learning basic words and how to communicate with our community members in a language that comforts and brings them strength?

So those are just some of the things I wanted to add in, and I'll pass it over to you now.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you.

We normally take a break about now, and I'm noticing a few people squirming. I'm wondering, would it be appropriate if we took about 10 minutes?

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Absolutely.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you.

--- Upon recessing at 11:35 a.m.

--- Upon resuming at 11:54 a.m.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Wela'lin, and welcome back.

We're going to continue with our talking circle here. And maybe for this round, maybe if I can get some perspective from the people here and virtually on what some of your perspectives or things you can -- you think we can do or recommend around firearm safety within our First Nations communities. And I know that you as all kind of have different perspectives, and I would really like to hear a bit more from each of you about some of your perspectives, because as we see in what happened out west, that it wasn't even a gun that did it, it was actually a knife, a stabbing that had -- that incident. So, I'd like to hear from some of the group here about that perspective in this round.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you very much, and thank you for the remarks you shared before the break as well.

One of the questions that I would love to hear from all of you on either this round or at some point, what are the places or the institutions or the people who are doing important community safety work that could use stable funding, that could perhaps make a big difference if they just got a little bit more help of one sort or another?

We heard last week again from Heidi about the really important work done by the Jane Paul Centre in Cape Breton, and we would love, as part of our recommendations making process, to hear from each of you about the places where more attention, more funding, to strengthen the initiatives that are coming from within your communities.

A couple of you have alluded to the ways in which often solutions are suggested from the outside. We would love to hear about what's happening on the inside that we could amplify, draw attention to, and possibly make recommendations to support further.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: I think that I'm going to comment on Cheryl's question first on firearm safety.

I grew up in a time where you didn't have to have a permit to buy a gun. Heck, half the time, we didn't even have a licence, but that's dating myself.

There was a time when you needed the food, you went out and you got the food. I spent a lot of my early adult years around Indian Brook and you know, putting food in the freezer. Today, you can't do that. It's very apparent with everything that goes on with firearms, stabbings, violence against other people.

Personally, I think that if we start our young people off very early within our communities, whether ii urban or reserve, and sort of make a mandatory course that would get their attention and keep their attention, and teach the firearm safety and possibly give the course to -- excuse me, not only the boys, but the girls as well, because there's an awful lot of women out there that put the food on the table.

I think that it should be accessible, somewhat like the Grade 10 Mi'kmaq language course that they have in the high schools. I think it needs to be done a little bit sooner, like, maybe even junior high school so that they have a little bit of that knowledge.

And I really think that with the kids that are coming in to junior high and high school, the harsher the better, because I think that a lot of the kids today are

being brought up as Mommy's boys and girls, and really have been sheltered from reality of what's going on in this world.

I think we have to go back to the old ways, especially on -- in communities, Indigenous communities, and the communities that surround those communities so that people know, people know how dangerous it is. The young people of today have -- kids today aren't born with racism in their hearts or hate in their hearts, they're hearing it from their adult parents, and those parents have heard it back to a time when coloured people and Indigenous people had to sit on the -- at the end of the bus. I remember those times, and I find that, you know, that's three generations now, so we have to get the young kids to get over the racism. People have to realize that, you know, our blood is red.

At the end of every prayer, we say, "All my relations." And yeah, I think that we really have to start with the younger generation, and with that, comes the generational trauma that the children from Portapique and surrounding areas is going to incur. And you know that Mom and Dad aren't going to seek help for these young adults. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Elder.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: So I'll start off with the firearms. So I'm in charge of FAC for Millbrook, so -- not saying in charge of, but I put on the program for people in our community. One of the things I -- what I'm doing now is you have to take the wilderness hunt outdoor program as long as with the FAC, so you properly know how to handle a gun. That's one thing we're doing there.

And for the kids' part, I'm putting on a survival camp for kids. It's a weekend thing, and it just teach you how to handle guns. They don't get to touch guns. Like, there are not going to be guns there, but gives them an idea of how to handle a gun, how to survive in the woods overnight, make a shelter, and stuff like that. That's coming up soon for us.

The program for funding, there's a program. There's money out

there, but to get the -- to jump through the right hoops to get to it, you pretty much have to have somebody sworn is a special constable to access that funding, right?

And the money we get for the RCMP is a lot. I can't speak too much on that. But yeah, but that's what we're doing in Millbrook for the FAC for handling a gun, and what we're doing for our youth. And there is funding out there; you just got to jump through the right hoops to get to it. Yeah, that's it.

MR. LUKE MARKIE: For firearms, I'm an avid hunter. I hunt every year. I deer hunt and moose hunt. I think having general knowledge information sessions, even if it's once a year -- like, you could have a once-a-year, like, FAC Course, Hunter Safety Course. It's a course where people get to learn about the gun. Knowledge is power, knowledge about the guns, how to handle the guns, how to properly store it. Storage is a huge, huge factor when it comes to it. As long as you know, like, you store your firearms in one; you store your ammunition in another; that's two separate -- that's two, three steps I've got to take before I have a loaded rifle. So giving people the chance to have information -- that extra information and really hitting it home is what gets it to stick.

So like Noel said, with -- if you have the ability within your community to put on the course where your young kids can learn survival at an earlier age, that will give them the ability to be more confident when it comes to using firearms and such, and they'll probably be more safer with it.

Personally, it's all within how you store it as well. If you don't have access to storing it in a safe at your house, maybe have a local place where a lot of people can hunt -- stash their rifles or something like that. But of -- the most important thing about, like, rifles and safety is having the separation so it's a longer process to get from bullets to ammo, and that's how I feel we could kind of regulate that, so.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

MR. JERID WATTON: I guess we have just a -- we're accepting we're always going to have guns in Indigenous community. They're part of our life.

They're part of our hunting style. It's something we're always going to have. I know in my community we'll hear gunshots randomly all the time but we don't necessarily worry about it because it's just someone hunting in their backyard, which, you know, we're not obviously supposed to, but it happens. So eventually, there is, in my community at least, a level of normality and comfortableness with this happening but I think, really, like they've said, it comes back to education.

I agree, we need yearly courses to keep people updated or notify them of changes in the laws, make sure that these people are still able to handle these weapons. And I think it's important to also start a young age with the kids, giving them information on these things. And I think, at the same time, we could tie in the RCMP education into that as well, bring them into the community while we're doing and introduce them to the kids and community members to kind of give us a different perspective on them, I guess, and a different perspective on the guns. It can help with the relationships. It just -- yeah, I guess you get a different view on what's actually happening, what the effects of these individuals and these items can be.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: I'm going to go to Clifford.

MR. CLIFFORD PAUL: Yeah, firearm safety, I think, you know, we're -- this is Nova Scotia. I think a firearms course in either junior high or high school is not a stretch. We want to start with the young people? Let's offer it in the schools. You know, if I was a -- if I was a high school student and one of my electives was a Nova Scotia Firearms Course, yes, I would take that course, especially -- you know, not make it mandatory for all students because not all students are in -- are going to be hunting, or fishing, or living off the land like we do, but I think we should bring it into the schools, a modified course just for people -- so people can understand it, and maybe another course where people can actually get -- work towards their certification, their PAL.

I think it's not a stretch because we're Nova Scotians and we have access to incredible resources through hunting and fishing. And I think that idea will

work, especially in communities that have First Nation control over their education. If we had a high school in Shubenacadie or Eskasoni -- those are two of our biggest communities. Maybe we can start there.

You know, in this world, you know, you can't predict what a person's going to do. And when things happen, everybody blames the police. It's the social structures, the family structure, and it's the lack of understanding, you know. Like, the person that did the killings in Nova Scotia, nobody predicted what he was going to do, but there were triggers and signs. And what happened in Saskatchewan, nobody can predict what that person was going to do, but there were triggers and signs, but the police can be part of that. But it all comes down to educating our youth and educating people, giving them that opportunity to understand the issues around safety with firearms and that, you know, you want -- you want a youth to access a firearm maybe through a youth hunt or through target practice. You want to make sure that person has safety in mind and some degree of training. So yeah, let's bring it into the school system, seriously.

You know, seriously, this is an idea that will help. It will educate a whole group of young people in Nova Scotia about firearm so if there's ever a time where a firearm ends in their hands, at least they have some training.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: It's -- I appreciate hearing the various input on this -- on this topic. And, of course, firearms is an important part of our mandate around safety and security and we've had some good panel discussions so far and expert reports that have been submitted to us and so it's very enlightening to hear perspective around this talking circle.

I think, you know, the responsibility and education are always at the centre of a lot of things related to community safety and wellbeing and so I'm just going to jump over to Emma's topic just a bit just to talk a little bit more about, you know, community safety and wellbeing at large and the importance of relationships and

collaboration in doing so. And thank you for pointing out, it's not -- it isn't just the responsibility of the police, and that's clearly not a way forward, and so that acknowledgment that it takes a whole community working together with other partner agencies and other resources to make our communities healthier and safer going forward.

I failed to mention earlier, on the security aspect, how important that relationship is as well between local police, whether it's RCMP or the municipalities. But to have a really solid working relationship with on-reserve security, it's something that I've seen develop as well and it's worth its weight in gold, so thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Thank you so much. I'm very grateful for the input we've received and I think I will say no more so that we can preserve some more time for our guests. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thank you, just a couple of comments. The -- I grew up in Southern Alberta and -- in a rural community in Southern Alberta and hunter education was part of my curriculum in junior high. And it's -- it makes complete sense to me that that kind of education should be available. I think that, you know, with this Commission our mandate is, with respect to firearms, it's with respect to access to firearms because of course the perpetrator didn't have a licence and wasn't a person with registered firearms. And so that has implications for the rest of our mandate with respect to, for example, the inclusion of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. And the prevalence of the use of guns in domestic homicides and especially in rural Canada, and so with respect to what we need to have in terms of education at an earlier age for kids has also got to be around healthy relationships and the ways in which violence can be avoided in communities by recognizing some of the red flags sooner that Clifford mentioned, and how to do that.

And so I think it's a sort of more expansive look at how these things all connect together and how we might help our kids grow up in healthy safe

communities.

So I appreciate that. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

So I'm going to just kind of add a little perspective in to the different topics.

So about firearm safety, I like the firearm safety course. I think it's a great idea that we incorporate it into our Indigenous schools and have Indigenous instructors there teaching them in our school system. I do want to say that I've taken the firearm safety course and I'm a pretty educated person and I found it difficult as an adult who is not an avid hunter, kind of doing the course. But I did pass it.

But there's also the complexity of the paperwork and the process of submitting it afterwards, where mine had collapsed. I forget to mail it in and then all of this other stuff, and then there's questions coming back. So I ended up not actually getting the full certificate even though I did the program and I have to do it again.

But one of the other things I was also thinking about was our communities are, as everybody had mentioned, are avid hunters. Moose season is coming upon us and I know in our First Nations community our health centre takes on the responsibility of coordinating that. But they're using it out of the health budget as a mental health. There should be a different stream of funding that we don't have to take from our mental health programs to provide this service for our communities. Or if they don't get it from the community, they're ended up having to fill out all of these cultural grants saying, you know, "This is part of our cultural tradition."

I know with the Woman's Associations they have to apply for grants to take their women hunting because it's not something that's normally -- it's not our traditional norm for our Indigenous women. So it's something that's coming around more but there's no set designated funding pool where we can kind of access that. You have to be really creative in accessing this kind of funding. And that's one of the things working in a non-profit association for many years; you get very creative at writing. But

it's not sustainable; it's only like a oe--time project, one off. So we can't continuously offer this every year and build up more momentum for more women to hunt or more children to hunt.

I also talk about the -- our communities are very financially strapped. We have a lot of people that have poverty issues. A lot of them are on welfare. They survive on $200 every two weeks. I don't know how they do it. And that's feeding a family with that limited income. And if they take a firearm safety course and they actually get the money to buy a gun or are gifted a gun, which guns are not cheap, for hunting, then where do they come up with the income to get that?

If there was a course we were going to offer, I thought it would be a really great incentive that we provide them with the safety box afterwards so they have something to store their guns as a thing, because most people don't have the money to do that. That's why, if you see a lot of them and that's why we get in trouble a lot, they have the soft cases. They can't afford the hard cases.

So we have to understand that our communities are financially strapped and they have to sometimes decide, "Am I going to feed the family or do I buy a gun safety thing?" And I can't feed my family without hunting sometimes because that meat sustains it so it's kind of all of these different intersections that we need to look at.

And also I was thinking the norms around the community -- if a person comes in -- let's say you come in our community on New Year's Eve. You'll -- everybody in the whole neighbourhood is shooting off a gun up in the air or something like that. So you have to understand these norms within our community structure that it is a very normal thing. And you will see a community member -- in my community, walking down the path with a gun on his shoulder because he's going to hunt deer down our local yard. But those are some of the thing, like, it's kind of a norm process for us.

And I was also thinking about the wilderness course. I think it's a great program that it should be incorporated with our communities. As mentioned earlier, a lot of our communities are remote and teaching our children and young people

how to survive in the wilderness is an essential. But once again, there's no set funding for it. If we have to, we have to take it out of another program or apply for a grant someplace to get these programs offered.

If we could figure out a way that we can infuse this into the school system it would be an incredible asset for all of our community members. Because I know in my community even creating awareness about what snares look like and that, because we have coyotes and bobcats and that around. So some of our hunters are setting those snares very close to our housing because they're now venturing closer and closer into our community. And even on who to notify if there's something going on in the community.

So I think those are important things. And when I was thinking about the positions and funding that needs to be provided, I think there should be a strong recommendation. I was part of the organization with the Native Women when we created the Jane Paul Centre. And we literally did it as a response to a high incident of Indigenous women within the sex trade circuit. And our women were going missing; they were having more abuses done upon them, and there was a big bust in the Cape Breton area. That's how we ended up getting support locally from there.

But there is a huge gap because we don't -- we have that centre in Sydney but a large portion of our women that are trafficked and brought is in the Halifax urban area. And we don't have an equivalent to the Jane Paul Centre in the Halifax area.

And if our women are brought into the sex trade or that, they're usually vented through the Halifax area. So there needs to be some type of support and system. And sometimes even at the Jane Paul Centre we felt like we were flying a plane but we were driving a plane while the plane was still being built. So the organization was evolving and becoming more what was needed at the community level versus what we thought up going down.

So we were talking with the women who were on the street and

sometimes it was them who would say, “Oh, we haven’t seen so-and-so a couple of days. You should go check on her, go to her place and that.” But it was grassroots driven instead of top down. So I’m going to continuously and always advocate that we need a similar Jane Paul Centre in the Halifax urban area for our Indigenous women in Halifax.

I was also thinking about positions. As I mentioned, like, this is the first time I've heard about a community safety position and I think it’s something that’s really essential in all of our First Nations communities. And I know government doesn't want to create funding and positions and all of that stuff that goes along with it, but I think it needs to be done. And you can always do it in your governmental approach which is, “Oh, let’s do a pilot in three different communities and then see how we can roll it out.”

But I’ll continue to advocate that every community is different, unique, and that it needs to be in all 13 communities, not just in a pilot phase just to see how it goes. And this would, I feel needs to be really like a public safety position but it has to help guide the community in how to develop a public safety approach in the community. They can take on things like what Noel is doing in his community with the FAC course and the wilderness course and being that liaison. But I think there also needs to be a liaison between the leadership and communities because right now there is a huge disconnect between the policing facilities in the community and the direction that the community is going in. And we need to figure out how we can make these align better to support things.

And I think that is all I have for my -- oh, gender-based violence.

Before I finish, one of the other things is I always say, because I was involved with the Nova Scotia Native Women’s and I know that child welfare has it where we’re always going to have limited reporting of violence because there is such a fear that their children are going to be taken away from them. If they report it to -- if they’re doing the right things -- say for example, their spouse and them had a

disagreement. They're doing the right thing, getting their child in counselling or something like that. They're being reported to Child and Family Services for doing the right thing and then they're under this immense pressure. Like, "Oh my God, they're going to take my child away. I was just trying to do the right thing to help my child. No, I'm not going to do anything anymore."

And that disconnects the relationship. It's so important that this trust isn't violated and that it's a safe place. If an Indigenous woman comes forward and says, "I need to report domestic violence in my house," the first step can't be Child and Family Service coming in, saying, "We're going to take your child because you reported violence." And that's a lived reality in our First Nations communities.

And it's in the urban setting as well. That is so important. Like, we're never going to fully even get the stats on what the violence is amongst women, because it's not reported because there is such a fear that you're going to take our child away. And as I said before, we now have more children in the child welfare system than we did at the peak of Residential School. And it's our lived reality, and as women we will take the abuse. We will take that to keep our child safe and home with us.

So with that, I'd like to pass it on. Thank you. And this will probably be our last round. I want to do a debrief, if there's any last thing you want to add in. And the other thing I always ask people is -- I know that these topics can be heavy. I really want you to think about something that you're going to do for self-care after this, whether it's a smudge, go for a walk -- do something. So with that, I'll pass it on.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you, Cheryl.

Given it's the last round and that we are towards the end of our time together, I'd prefer to pass and here from others, and just say I'm very grateful for the conversation we've had today.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: Thank you.

You touched on a very touchy subject, and I know that sexual

assault and reporting is pretty bad, even in the communities surrounding reserves, because not everybody lives on a reserve. But I know, through first-hand experience dealing with other people who are in similar situations, that they would rather continue living with assault by their partner than to call for help. And whether the parents realize it or not, the children see it, and there again, trauma.

But there is hope here in Halifax. And I'm not quite sure that too many people know about this, but the Halifax Native Friendship Centre, the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre, now has a medical clinic with four qualified doctors and a very beautiful, very skilled RN. She carries my DNA, so I have to brag about her. And there's going to be a lot of services for women and children at the friendship centre for violence and sexual assault and things like that, but this is a brand new clinic. They're still trying to get their closets organized and people's schedules, and it would be really great if possibly the reserves and our people would share that information, because as you know, there's an awful lot of Indigenous people living in urban centres throughout Nova Scotia that don't have family doctors.

So this place is, in the future, going to be state of the art, the greatest thing, and hopefully we'll be able to share some of the knowledge and some of the -- what's the word I'm looking for? I'm having a senior moment -- some of the programs and services back and forth, so that the urban people will feel more Indigenous. And that's totally incorrect for me to say that, but that's the only way that I can say it, because a lot of times we don't feel like we're part of the Indigenous community because we're so far away. So just maybe this medical centre and the things that they plan for the future will bring us all a little bit closer.

MR. NOEL BROOKS: I appreciate the invite to come here and talk. I wish I could say more, but I can only talk about so much.

I have to leave soon. I have another meeting at 1:00 and I'm about 25 minutes from that one, but if anyone has any questions about what my department actually does, you can call me at the band office. We can meet for lunch, go for coffee,

or you can just come into my office. We do a lot more than just security and bylaws. We're also EMO, OHNS. We help out EMO and help OHNS. We take care of the elders and their sheds, the elders' pets. We take care of just a big -- a lot of stuff. Yeah. That's pretty much it.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

We'll pass it over to Jerid.

MR. JERID WATTON: So I'm going to keep this pretty short, I guess. I guess I kind of want to hammer home these same points. It's going to come back to education, rebuilding relationships between Indigenous people, the RCMP, and everyone else in between, and communication. We need to work on our communication as a whole. It can't just be on one level. It has to be top down and bottom up.

And I also want to thank you guys all for inviting us here today.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

Clifford.

MR. CLIFFORD PAUL: I think this discussion today opened up a lot of portals for future discussions with different issues, but they're all related. It comes down to the safety of our community members and the safety of our communities, both First Nation and non-First Nation.

Again, I have to reiterate that the strength of our relationship -- and you know because allyship is what you teach. It's beyond partnership. I always tell people that if you want to work well with the Mi'kmaq, you better have them as allies and take it beyond partnership, because every visitor that came to our shores found out that if you're an ally, you're in good standing in Nova Scotia in our traditional territories. You're in very good standing. You know, the British weren't our allies and it was pretty rugged for them, you know what I mean? They had to ask us to sign a treaty of peace and friendship.

And I think it all comes down to education. It all comes down to

creating allies with the Department of Justice and move forward with our communities. If the community policing model wants to make a comeback, let it. If our community is not happy with the RCMP or any municipal police force, let's look at setting up our own tribal police forces, but make sure that the negotiations and the funding is good faith. I know that the negotiations were not in good faith post-Marshall. I mean the Marshall Inquiry, not the Marshall decisions. That's another thing, but I'd say wherever we go, the safety of our community members, the safety of our officers, the safety of every one of us outside of the community is very important.

Could this be the catalyst of that relationship-building? It better be, you know what I mean? It better be because the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq built a really nice alert system, and if we had information -- and I don't know if we did or not. I don't even know if we were set up then, but we do have a good system in place for missing persons, for violence, escapees and things like that, violent offenders. Anything that happens that warrants notifications, it occurs, so I know our Mi'kmaq community, through the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, have something like that, and I think a commission such as this can benefit from -- I think the coordinator's name is Jennifer Jesty. She may have appeared before this Commission. I think she was telling me about something like that. But take a close look at what she's got going for all our communities.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Clifford.

And before I turn it over to the commissioners, I just want to thank everybody for coming and sharing your thoughts and your perspectives with the circle here today.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Thank you.

I just want to express my gratitude, and hope that some of the experiences I was able to share today from policing along the Wolastoq River in my home province is helpful. And you're 100 percent right. It is way beyond partnerships; it is about relationships. And that is one of the reoccurring themes of our Commission's

work -- is understanding that it's so critical to have healthy interpersonal relationships, family relationships, community relationships, and institutional relationships. And so that's a recurring theme that I found was reinforced here today as well. So thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: I just want to say with humility how rich and helpful the conversations today have been, and I'm enormously grateful for it, and not just for your appearance today, but for all your leadership and advocacy and teachings. I'm very, very appreciative. Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thanks. Clifford, yes, we did hear from Jennifer. She was very helpful. She came and spoke to us when we had conversations about alerting, and we were very glad to learn about the system that's been set up in the communities, and she was a wealth of information as well, and we're all enriched, as Michael and Leanne have said, by all of your knowledge, all of you today, and we're very grateful, so thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: And with that, I'd like to thank everybody, but I want to turn it over to the elder, because I know it is part of our tradition if we open, for us to close the circle as well.

So with that, I'll pass it over to Elder Marlene.

(Closing Prayer)

--- Upon recessing at 12:35 p.m.

--- Upon resuming at 1:51 p.m.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: …have the honour of thanking you once again. Thank you for -- not just for today, this morning as well and this afternoon, but you've been with us many steps of the way, including our opening, and I have learned so much from you, and I'm so grateful for your wisdom and the peace and -- you bring to the room, and how inclusive you are. You include everyone and you're teaching us great lessons, and we are truly appreciative of all you're doing. Thank you so much.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Commissioner.

My name is Cheryl Copage-Gehue, and I'm the Indigenous Advisor for the Halifax Regional Municipality, and I'm also a councillor with Shubenacadie First Nation.

And in my past, I have worked in every other sector, so I've worked as a Senior Health Analyst, a Policy Analyst. I've worked with the chiefs, with the Native Women's Association, the AFN Regional Office.

So I'm very honoured to be here to facilitate today's talking circle.

As with always, we always like to acknowledge that these proceedings are happening on the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation. It is our unceded territory that is governed by our Peace and Friendship Treaties of this territory in this region.

So with that, I'd like to thank you all.

And before we start the circle, I just want to go through a few things. Can we go to the next slide?

Is that -- I'm going to ask everybody to keep in mind our Seven Sacred Teachings while we're doing our session.

We want everybody to be honest here and speak your truth, let everybody know what our community experiences are and how this has affected the Indigenous community.

But we also want to have patience to understand each other, because a lot of people don’t understand our perspective from a First Nations community, and we need to take time to explain to them this.

And we need to respect the opinions of others as well and exercise humility while we are sharing.

And one of the things that always grounds us as First Nations people is that we love and support one and each other, and that we respect the fact that we all are bringing our individual wisdoms here today, collectively.

Next slide.

So for our talking circle, I just wanted to go through a few things, that in our talking circle format, we'll go around this way, and I will pass the feather as we go along, but each person talks until they are finished. There is no interrupting a speaker or trying to talk across the circle or adding in. We want to respect that this individual has -- it's their opportunity to speak and that everyone will get a chance to speak on, so if somebody happens to say something that you want to build on, make a note, and when it's your turn to speak, add onto it.

If, at this -- if we're doing a topic and you really don't have much to add, it's nothing wrong with saying, "Can you please pass over me on this round and I'll add something in the next round."

And we're probably going to do this circle multiple times because there are lots of different areas, so each kind of round, each circle, I'll raise a different topic that I'll ask us to discuss on it.

And what we say -- this is a Public Commission -- but usually, what we say in a circle stays in a circle. This time, we're sharing with the larger community what we want to share.

And it's important that we respect everyone's individuality and what they have to say. Even if it may be different from our perspectives, we respect that that's their truth and what they're speaking and that's their story.

So with that, I'm going to ask everybody to do maybe an introduction of yourself, and what you're representing in your community, and then we'll get into a round, like, our first discussion areas. And we do have some people online, so maybe, Commissioner, before we get to you, I'll go to the people onscreen.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you, Cheryl.

My name's Emma Cunliffe. I am a settler, immigrant to Canada. I live these days in the traditional ancestral and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, and I'm a visitor here in Mi'kma'ki.

I have the honour of serving as the Director of Research and Policy for the Mass Casualty Commission.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: Hello, everyone. My name is Marlene Companion. I'm a founding member of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation.

I grew up here in Halifax, and I'm honoured to be part of the Urban Elders Council here in Halifax through their Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre.

I do an awful lot of work with youth at risk and youth that have gone beyond risk, and we work at getting them back out into their communities.

I'm very honoured and full of gratitude, not to have Indigenous boys and girls into a youth jail, but I'm very honoured and humbled to be able to get them back into communities.

I've been the elder for this Commission since they started, and sometimes it's hard and sometimes I see a light at the end of the tunnel when I come here, and today, I see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it's very uplifting, and my heart feels so much better today being here.

MS. JULIANA JULIAN: Hi. My name is Juliana Julian, and I am the Health Director for Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaw Nation.

I've been Health Director for a number of years. Initially, when I said yes to coming here, I really was hoping to be more of an observer, but that's fine.

I am very interested in a number of different things, and I've been working in our community to address a lot of sexual violence and a lot of domestic violence and stuff like that in our community, so I was really -- that's one of the biggest reasons why I really wanted to get involved here. We've had a number of committees in our community and I've tried to work and address some of those things, and we've had some projects as well, so that's why I was really wanting to get involved here.

MS. PHILLIPA PICTOU: Hi. Can you hear? Does ---

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: You're naturally soft-voiced.

MS. PHILLIPA PICTOU: I know. It's terrible. I'm Phillipa Pictou

and currently I'm the Director of Policy and Planning for Tajikeimik. And before that, I was the Health Director in Pictou Landing for about 12 years. And I guess my -- one of the biggest things in Pictou Landing was shortly after I had started there, we ended up having to take the Federal Government to court for Jordon's Principle. Anyway, we won. And since then, it's given me some wings. And with the health directors, we've come together and formed our own Mi'kmaq Health Organization, which is where I'm currently working, and we're looking at -- well, we're not looking at it. We are taking back health from the Federal Government and transforming the way that the services are offered in the community.

And so I think that a lot of -- well, most of the things with the Mass Casualty Commission are around health and wellness and has a big impact on Mi'kmaq communities and so I guess that's why we're here.

MS. SHARON RUDDERHAM: Hello, my name is Sharon Paul Rudderham and I am Mi'kmaq from Membertou First Nations. I am also a descendent of Indian Residential School and Indian Day School parents. For -- currently, I guess, I'm working alongside Phillipa and working collaboratively with Health Directors of Nova Scotia with our new organization -- health and well organization, Tajikeimik, and -- or Tajikeimik. You know, there's different pronunciations sometimes in communities. And the vision of our organization is -- and the meaning of that word in our Mi'kmaq language is "to be healthy". So that is the ultimate vision and goal of our organization and the work as health directors providing services in First Nations communities.

For the last -- for the past 20 years, before coming to my work at Tajikeimik, I was Health Director in Eskasoni First Nation, which is the largest Mi'kmaq community east of Montreal, and so I have a wealth of experiences from life and work in Indigenous communities and I'm here to share those experiences, I guess, in our dialogue today, and also to share what health directors and communities from right across all of Nova Scotia and our First Nations communities really need to pass along to this Commission. And I'm thankful for the opportunity today to come together and have

a -- have an opportunity to share the experiences that we have within our Indigenous community, or our Mi'kmaq communities. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Sharon.

MS. LAURIANNE SYLVESTER: Good after, everyone. My name is Laurianne Sylvester. I'm from Membertou First Nation from Mi'kmaq territory, one of the seven districts of Mi'kma'ki. I'm an educator. I've been an educator for 25 years, maybe. I know I don't look that old but -- I was a teacher at elementary school, went into administration at the school in my own community, and I moved on to further my education and became a director of education and now I'm the Dean of Unama'ki College, part of Cape Breton University, which is where I'm going to retire because I love the job so much because I get to support the students that I see myself in as a student.

And I'm very happy to be here to be part of this discussion. I know that we are -- we are living in communities, regardless of where we are, of some uncertainty as there's more substance use and abuse and different types of personalities that walk amongst us, and so to help build safer communities, I enjoy being part of that because I'm very interested in that. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

MS. LAURIANNE SYLVESTER: Oh, I wanted to say, too, that my mum is a Residential -- not Residential School, Indian Day School survivor.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Before we introduce you, Commissioner, I'm going to ask Karla to introduce herself.

MS. KARLA STEVENS: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Karla Stevens. I am currently from the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaw. I'm currently the Indigenous Knowledge Coordinator for the Circles of Support and Change Project, which is a project of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre. This project had come about from a project that was implemented here in Paq'tnkek. Juliana had spoken a little bit about that, and we're from the same community and we worked on the same

project. The Circles of Support and Change Project now is working with rural and isolated communities for the African-Nova Scotian communities, for Canso, and for Richmond County. We've been doing this work for almost three and a half years. We have two more years left on our contract and I'm just really here to learn and to observe from everybody.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Karla.

Tuma?

MR. TUMA YOUNG: Good afternoon. Kwe Msit Wen: Welta'si pekisin tetal. Greetings to everyone. I am to Tuma Young and I am just -- in a deck of cards, I would be called the Joker. I fit in everywhere. I'm here with Unama'ki College and doing research on our legal traditions and our legal principles here. And I have here in my office -- I have one of my students here, Lauren Walsh-Marshall and she's going to be sitting and learning. So I'm just going to turn the camera over to her so she can say just a hello or something.

MS. LAUREN WALSH-MARSHALL: Hi, everybody. I'm Lauren and I'm from Membertou First Nation and I'm just here to listen to all you guys and learn. This will be my first, like, talking circle like this in a long time so I'm excited. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Lauren, for joining us, as well.

I'll go over to the Commissioner now.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Thank you and good afternoon. My name is Leanne Fitch. I'm a Commissioner on the Commission of Inquiry here, born and raised in New Brunswick but I have deep roots as well in Nova Scotia on my father's side of the family. He was born in Halifax, raised in Parrsboro and other parts of the province, and I currently still have immediate and extended family here in the Province of Nova Scotia. I've often said I have one foot in each province, I think.

In my previous role prior to the Commission, I retired in 2019 as

Chief of Police in Fredericton. And Fredericton, New Brunswick, is of only, I think, maybe three, if I'm not mistaken, municipalities in Canada that have a quadripartite agreement. I think I understand Membertou, as well, has a quadripartite agreement between the city, province, First Nations, and Federal Government. And over the course of more than three decades, I had wonderful opportunities to work and build relations in what was -- what I knew as, growing up, St. Mary's First Nation, now officially recognized as Sitansisk, along the Wolastoq River, and I bring with me, I guess, some unique experiences from being a young patrol officer through to Chief. I failed to mentioned this morning in our earlier session that I also had the distinct honour to work with some very fine First Nations Chiefs of Police through the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police on the First Nations, Inuit and Metis Committee. And Chief John Dom and I were co-chair on the CECP Committee for community safety and wellbeing. And the reason I raise that is we have a very shared interest in the community safety and wellbeing and recognition that it takes all people coming together to make a safe and healthy community. So it's an honour to be here.

Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Thank you. Michael MacDonald. I was born and raised in Whitney Pier, Cape Breton. I mentioned this morning that my grandfather was born and raised in Soldier's Cove which is joining the Potlotek First Nation. And I recall my father going to Chapel Island on the Feast of Ste. Anne many summers. And I was fortunately raised in a home which had a deep and abiding respect and honour of the Mi'kmaq and therefore I come to you humbly knowing that our work will be so much enriched by your presence and by your input.

So I thank you all very much.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thank you. I'm Kim Stanton. I'm a guest here in Mi'kma'ki. I usually reside in the territory shared by the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat peoples amongst other guests who -- those territories. Very grateful to be here as a Commissioner to hear from all of you.

Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you. So for this round I'm going to ask that we go back and we think about the day of the -- and share maybe some of your recollections about the mass casualty and about some of the concerns about communication and even about the community's wellbeing or safety or the role the police took that day, or maybe some perspectives on how communities and organizations can make our communities a bit more safer.

And I shared a bit this morning but I'll share a little bit again this afternoon. My community was --

My community is Sipekne'katik First Nation which was very close to where Joey Weber had passed. Right where Joey had passed is right where our community physician, the majority of our community at the time before we had our health centre went to go see their doctor. And it's also one of our main routes where people are always going around fishing and that territory. And it's also very close to where Constable Heidi Stevens lost her life. Our community was literally five minutes away from there with actually community members who live off the reserve being right down the hill from where that accident happened.

So this was very close to us and we had lots of people within our community who were in the need of medical care or assistance from the police at the time. We had a woman who was run over by a car and we had to -- we were waiting for police assistance to come, and thankfully volunteer fires came and were able to stay with us until an officer came.

But there was lots of concerns about that. And I share earlier that the majority of our community aren't on Twitter or on social media. If anybody is on anything they're mostly on the Facebook platform and that's how the majority of us had learned about the incidents that were happened. But we didn't realize how close it was to our doorstep.

So with that I'm going to pass it on.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you, Cheryl. I think this is a good round for me to listen. Thank you.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: I agree,

MS. JULIANA JULIAN: I think when it all came out, I think Cheryl's right, very much so. No one really knew what was going on and I think that everybody was hearing bits and pieces on social media through Facebook. And it was a lot of Who is it? Whereabouts is it happening? You know, I know there was a lot of concern from our area. Like, is it happening? Is it someone from one of our neighbouring communities, First Nation communities? So thinking it was Cheryl's community and wondering was it affecting those community members, and really worrying about what that would mean if it involved our community, ad what that would mean if it meant that somebody outside of the community hurt someone in one of our communities.

I started in my own mind -- and I know you get -- your mind races when you don't know what's going on. So it's all those what-ifs. So in my mind I kept thinking what if he ended up in the community and he hurt somebody in the community? What if it's somebody from the community that hurt somebody off? And what I'm getting at is that whether we want to admit it or not, it would be a complete division of non-First Nation and First Nation, and what that would mean for all of Nova Scotia, all of Canada. Do you know what I mean?

There would be such big implications if that were the case, regardless of whether it was the intention, if that was the intention of it, or anything like that, because my mind was racing. And I just thought, "What would happen if it did end up that way?" because there would be such a further division.

And in my own mind I new -- I figured it had to e domestic, you know, right away. That was my thought; it has to be domestic. And I don't know that information was gotten -- I guess even information is to try and stay off the highways. Like, why are we on -- why are they shutting the highway down? Like, all those

questions.

And it's easy for us to say that because we don't know what's going on. But I think that those were some of the things that everybody was really worried about. Like, should I shut everything down? Like, we should have. We were quick enough to shut down everything for Covid, you know, was my mindset in thinking at the time. But anyway, I think that's -- I'll just leave it as that.

MS. PHILIPPA PICTOU: Well, when it happened I was living in Onslow Mountain, just outside Debert. And everybody started phoning me to make sure I was okay. I hadn't heard about it; I had been outside at the time. And so my daughter called frantic and said, "Go in and lock all your doors. Stayin your room."

So that was kind of a panic thing and then Facebook blew up. And then I started hearing that he was going towards Millbrook and people in Millbrook had seen him and that's where my children were living. And so then I was starting to have the opposite panic thing about oh my God, he's going by my children and my grandchildren now, and feeling totally helpless. So stuck in my room, watching everything on Facebook and panicking about the safety of everybody in the community that I then wasn't able to even go and check to see if they were okay.

And then everybody kept on phoning to check to see if I was okay, so like, between going on the phone and Facebook, I was just going crazy, wondering. I have a small farm so worrying about whether or not I needed to do anything to stick the animals out of the way, all of that. I was basically alone with that.

But it was also very triggering for me as a survivor of violence in the past because instantly I also went into protection mode of oh my God, I need to, you know, basically protect myself and my children. And then a kind of a trigger reaction. And then there was the whole case around the police car and worrying about the RCMP car; who was a real police, who wasn't.

For weeks after that if I came by an RCMP car as I was driving to work or something, I would -- literally my hands would be shaking and I'd be thinking,

"My God, I hope they don't stop me because I don't know if I actually would stop at this point."

And I know that other people in the community also felt that way. And there was really no good information source at that point about even what was happening besides Facebook. And there was a lot of conjecture. And then when he stopped at Keith's gas bar in Millbrook, people were -- you know, had just missed him. They had just closed it on time before he got there and so then there was that whole panic about what if they hadn't closed it in time and he had gone into the gas bar? So there was basically a lot of panic. And I don't know if I was triggered by it. Other people in the community definitely were also triggered by that, and also that sense of not being able to trust police fully and how that whole piece impacted on both those, the triggering and the police relations. So the people that you would call for help may not actually be helpful. I don't know. I guess that was my personal experience of that situation.

MS. SHARON RUDDERHAM: Unfortunately, I don't remember, but what it does make me think about is how such a traumatic event has occurred within the Province of Nova Scotia and how it has impacted across Canada. To me, it brings me to a different understanding and a different thinking. Understanding how this traumatic event had impacted everyone here in Nova Scotia, it brings me back to thinking about the connectivity that exists in our Mi'kmaq communities.

Within our Mi'kmaq communities, many of you are hopefully aware of the historical trauma that has occurred because of government policies and the plan to eliminate our population. What I'm trying to explain is that when individuals and communities are traumatized and continue to experience compounded grief and continue to experience crisis situations -- you know, we often hear on the news First Nations communities are in crisis. A Saskatchewan community just went through a traumatic experience with a mass casualty type of event as well. And I want to have people understand that when communities face trauma or these types of experiences, it impacts everyone. It impacts the entire community, even though you're not related.

You may not be related, but there's a connectivity that exists amongst Indigenous people or First Nations people, and especially Mi'kmaq people, that when there are traumas or deaths that occur in First Nations communities, it's about supporting each other and supporting each community during these traumatic events, and coming together to seek the solutions on how we can learn from these situations and create a more comprehensive -- or improve the services and programs and many other components.

It's unfortunate that, because of these traumatic policies of genocide that existed within our population, the relationship between government and police has been impacted, somewhat in the same way that Nova Scotia is being impacted. They no longer feel that trust. That trust has been lost, and that trust has been lost for many, many years within Indigenous communities. But non-Indigenous communities couldn't relate to that experience.

So I think that we know that police are supposed to be there to help us. We know that they're also there to act and respond for government and policies and laws and whatever else that is required, but they're not enforcing our laws; they're not enforcing our concerns.

As a health director working during the pandemic, we were raising issues to the RCMP. They wouldn't respond. They wouldn't act until they got direction from HQ. Ottawa had to give them direction on whether or not they could respond. And I know Nova Scotia went through the same kind of thing, but it's about -- I don't know. I guess I'm going to reference that there may be -- I don't know if it's fear or if it's -- or what exists that they have to follow what the bosses say. And I know that we all live in that environment. We have to listen to what our employers say to some extent, but if you're building a relationship with communities, you have to listen to community. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Sharon.

Laurie.

MS. LAURIANNE SYLVESTER: Thank you, Sharon. You just have to love when someone speaks from the heart -- very powerful.

I remember that clip on TV when the shooter stopped in Millbrook. That scared me. My brother is an RCMP officer. He's retired now, and he lives not even five minutes before the community. He lived there at the time. So when that had happened, of course we're all -- because of the connectivity within our communities, we're all looking out for one another. We're not looking within our own community. Every community is connected. When something happens in Sipekne'katik, we feel that. When something happens in Eskasoni, we feel that. If it's in one of the other districts of Mi'kmaq in New Brunswick, Quebec, PEI, we feel that.

So when that happened, my brother was already posted to Baddeck so all of his gear was in Baddeck. So he didn't get to go on the call, so our families are grateful that he didn't go on the call, because we wonder, would the story be different for our family, for our communities? That footage that's always showed on TV on the news always makes me wonder "What if?" What if Keith didn't get notified, the owner of the gas bar, that the shooter was in that area and he acted really quickly? But we all knew that. We were like, "Oh my God. The gas bar, the gas bar." And sure enough, he was right in front of the gas bar.

So it could have been worse than it is. I mean, it's horrible already, but I know within our communities, it would have really been horrific, when we imagine "What if? What if?" Right? Everyone does that, but with our communities now -- I believe there was an emergency alert that was specific to our communities, and if a child went missing or there was something going on within one of our communities, we would get alerted. I don't know if that's still a thing, but maybe just nothing happened since. But it's a good thing because Facebook -- we can't think that everybody is on social media, but most people have a phone, and if I don't have a phone, the person next to me would have the phone. And you can sure hear that alert, because it's pretty loud. But I think it's a good tool for our communities to alert us if something's going on

in our communities.

You know, there's other questions around plans if something happened, so we talked during lunch about the plans, you know, what if things happen in our community, what's the plan?

Not all of us have that, and I think, you know, we should get something together before something happens and not wait until something happens before we -- you know, before something does happen. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

Karla?

MS. KARLA STEVENS: I'm just going to say that day was very -- an uneasy day, just learning how things unfolded throughout the morning and the evening in Portapique.

I just thought the uncertainty and just not knowing, like, the whole magnitude of everything that was going on and just, you know, getting bit and pieces of the information very slowly, which was more alarming, I think, to people that were in the rural and isolated communities, just to know what direction he was in, what direction he was going, if this was still continuing on, or how it was going to end.

So yeah, it was a lot of uncertainty. I know for a lot of community members who felt, you know, triggered by all this, they felt -- yeah, I just think the impact on myself was really a hard one. I did lose a friend, Corrie Ellis, in the shooting, and he was a really good friend that I've known for, you know, 10-plus years.

I've lived in Millbrook for quite some time, so I was quite familiar with Corrie. I hung out with him multiple times but didn't realize that he was a victim until later on in that evening, which a friend of mine had called and mentioned that he was one of the victims of the shooting. And then we had realized the actual numbers of how many people were killed, so it was quite alarming. It was quite triggering for myself.

But to understand just how to move forward and how to be safe, I

do have small children, so that was obviously a concern as well, and I had children away from home that are in school and things like that. So it was, you know, just a layer on top of layer of concern, and just uncertainty of what was happening.

So it was a really, really uncertain day. It was a scary day. It was filled with lots of emotion.

So I just feel, yeah, that it was a very emotional day for myself by losing my friend Corrie and others that were just such traumatic, you know, ways to go. I think just reliving all that was very difficult for myself. Thanks.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Okay.

Tuma?

MR. TUMA YOUNG: I remember that day and I'm a little bit like Sharon. I also don't remember a whole lot. And I attributed that to, you know, the initial trauma response that I've gone through many, many times, and also, given the position that I am in, I'm also very much aware of what a leadership response should be, very carefully, very -- you know, get the information.

I also was looking at it through the lens of endogeneity, you know, and I said, "I'm quite privileged to live in a community outside of this zone, that's -- I feel very safe." Why? Because there's a number of retired RCMP officers that live on my street, and the Chief of Police for Cape Breton region lives one street over. We're pretty safe, you know, because I can -- know that.

But I didn't have a whole lot of information. And I thought about my family next zone, and I remember that I didn't really feel too much worry for them. I hate to say it, because they were in a lockdown. They had a barrier at the -- at both ends of the reserve because of the COVID.

Regardless of whether -- what freedoms and you know, what this means and legalities and the whole thing, I thought, well, if it happens here, you know, that person will have to go through several layers of Native people that have blockades, and in order to get to.

So I was pleasantly pleased that there was a blockade, I guess, to say that, at the church. Now, whether the legality of the blockades is another thing, right?

But one thing I also note that yes, social media played a very important role, and I kept going back between social media and news reports and trying to find out stuff, because in the Mi'kmaq community, information is power, you know? And whoever has the correct information, the first information, you know, has -- you know, gets them the elevated state in our community.

I'm also very cognizant about that because of that, I have to be very careful of what I say and think, and that other people are saying, "Well, what is Tuma going to say about this," right, so very cautious. I just want to make sure that everything -- but the lockdown was actually quite refreshing for me, in that sense, that I felt like I was away from it all, you know?

But I also think that -- I'll be blunt -- I had to think about the fact that almost all of the folks who were the victims and involved in this were all white. And that plays an -- that we were, you know, I saw the (audio failure) stuff in Shubenacadie, but I thought, what is the reaction to this? How is this going to be, you know? You had to see it through that lens, I guess, you know, and I can't be -- how will they treat this, you know? And seeing things, how are they different, right, you know?

I think about my own thing and there's lots of things that come forward. And I just make sure to keep myself grounded. I will admit that I took some smudge and I smudged myself whenever I felt a little overstimulated with information, you know, trying to process it all, even when we're watching it.

And I just thought, you know, where are we going to end up in this?

That's what I remember of that day.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Lauren, would you like to add anything?

MS. LAUREN WALSH: I'm just listening.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner?

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Thank you.

I remember the day very well, and what I didn't share with this circle today that -- or this afternoon that I did this morning is that during my time in Fredericton in 2018, we had our own mass casualty in Fredericton where we lost two of our citizens and two of my officers.

And we're a small department of -- we're only 105 people, so -- and it's a small city.

And so that's kind of the backdrop for what I'm going to share with what I remember. I was in my barn -- I live in rural New Brunswick -- and having my coffee and listening to CBC Radio on Sunday morning, as is my kind of practice, I guess.

And you may not know that in New Brunswick, we only get CBC Halifax on the weekends, so I was listening to CBC out of Nova Scotia, and heard events unfolding. And my first reaction was just heartbreak and shock, like, for others.

And my mind went immediately to a few things, one of which was the impact that this would be having on my own city, my own community that was still healing from 2018, our officers, other first responders.

And as I mentioned before, St. Mary's is -- the city grew up around St. Mary's First Nation, and the incident was only a few blocks over, so not too far away.

So my thoughts went to the trauma that would follow in my community and with those who were involved, and obviously, of the family members and the -- those most affected in Fredericton.

And the other part of it was a quick conversation with my mother, because we have family in Nova Scotia, in Pictou County, and we were very concerned about their well-being as well, so that some frantic phone calls from New Brunswick to Nova Scotia.

I share all that with you for a number of reasons, and one is, Sharon, to your point, the ripple effects. Our backdrop for the Mass Casualty Commission wasn't by accident, it was by design, because we recognize the ripple effect that this event has had, and continues to have.

And my hope is that through the work of our Commission and with the help of folks like you that the ripple effect of will be, hopefully, helpful going forward. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: Thank you for your very poignant testaments. I'm stuck the breath of hurt and sorrow that this has caused and you had mentioned about it rippling not only from Portapique -- and of course, Portapique was just one of the communities that the perpetrator drove through, and took lives, and caused so much sorrow, but it ripples through, and not only the entire country but a family in the United States as well, and it's everywhere. And for you to learn that you've lost a friend, Karla, just strikes me that the pain and hurt and sorrow is everywhere and I find that very poignant and I thank you for sharing all your various thoughts. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: Thank you.

And Sharon, I'm really struck by what a terrible thing to have in common for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to have lost trust in their institutions and -- or the institutions that are -- that are the public safety institutions and for people to not have understood that at a profound level, and then to have horrendous insight into that longstanding loss of trust for Indigenous communities is a really terrible commonality and -- thank you for bringing that forward. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: For this round, I think we're going to have a -- just build off a little bit more of the discussion that we had. There was a lot of great pointed raised, really relevant points. Our communities, Indigenous communities, have a distrust in structures. Police were never really there to protect us. At least historically, we always felt they came into our communities to enforce other

laws upon us that weren't ours, or they were coming in to take our children to Residential School, so there's a huge mistrust. And then when something like this happens with an individual in a police car -- I've heard that from many people, "I don't think I would have stopped if it was a police. I would have -- follow me home. I'll take me right to the police station that I know the police officers, where I feel safe with, and then you can talk to me there, if I was going to be stopped that day."

But I also wanted to talk about the real need for safety. And Tuma, you made a really good point. I totally forgot that we had police checks on our community that day, too, because we had implemented a police check because of Covid because we wanted to control and see who was coming in and out of our community. And I totally blanked on that because when incidents I happened to -- was I went through the checkpoint going to Tim Horton's because I didn't know any different, was on the roads and was coming across and seeing cars, and individuals, and accidents, and it was quite the day.

But I really wanted to get some perspectives because I know a lot of you work in the health sector, and what can we do to make our communities more safe? This is opportunity to tell the Commission what we need to feel safe in our communities, what type of supports we need for mental health for our membership. This is just one of many layers of traumas that our Indigenous community has and this -- it compounds after a while and we need to make sure that we have sustainable, ongoing support services for our First Nation communities and members to deal with this trauma and other traumas that are compounded over all the years.

And a lot of these organizations are colonized organizations that have a very structured -- because we talked earlier about we all have bosses and at lunch we had a discussion -- and it must be a policy, I'm thinking, because the same thing happens in my First Nations community, that the ambulances won't come up until there's a police escort. I don't know if this happens in any other communities but our -- within a First Nation's structure, our community members who are in distress do not get

immediate service until they have a police escort there with them to accompany them.

So I'm going to pass it on now, thank you.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Thank you very much, Cheryl.

Karla, I'm so sorry for your loss.

Tuma, I appreciate you naming whiteness as a part of this conversation. I want you to know that I heard you on that and I appreciate it being brought into the circle.

Many of you have shared the good work that you're doing in your communities to build -- to reclaim, for example, health services, to build culturally appropriate services for your people, services that will -- will work better than many of the colonial institutions that have formed the paradigm of many years. I would love to hear more about that work, to the extent that you feel able to share it, and, in particular, to hear about how the Commission in its report and its recommendations can potentially support your work and whether that's -- whether that's about stable funding, whether that's about drawing attention to the good work that's taking place. That's something that I would very much like to hear about.

MS. JULIANA JULIAN: That's kind of a -- to me, when you're asking that question, it's -- it's so huge. You know, I sit here and I just -- and I'm sorry to be so emotional but it's, like, there's other stuff going on with our communities right now and -- but it's so big. There's so many things when you think about trying to have a safe community.

We -- you know, we had discussions earlier this morning about crisis teams and what that would mean for our communities, and what it could potentially mean for our communities, and how it would be, you know, providing, you know, safe care for members of our community. How when it affects one -- you know, when something happens in one community, you're right, it has a ripple effect. Sharon said it right on. Like, it's not just about what's happening in Eskasoni. It's not just what's happening in Paqtnkek. It's all over.

And to say that we don't have a trust for RCMP, that's an understatement. Like, that's a severe understatement. We lost our chief not long ago and so many times we looked to RCMP to help because there's nothing in place to try and help in -- at different times. And I think about it; we didn't really have anything in place to help our community members. So now we have a loss of our chief and how do we support our community now when we've lost our leader because, really, there is nothing in place -- because you know that we're going to have members that are going to be, you know, self-medicating with alcohol, drugs, you know. Violence will end up occurring. So who do we run to, the police? I don't think so. Definitely not.

So when I look at our communities and I think about what we need to have safe communities, there's so much more to just asking us here that are sitting in this circle. It's about talking to communities. It's about listening to communities. I just recently went to school for my education degree. And it's funny because in health, you know, there's a lot of talk about cultural competency, cultural safety, and then, when I went to school, it was cultural pedagogy. And I think that that struck me bigger than anything because it came right down to, you get to know the individuals. You get to know what their culture is because you get to know them, who they are, where they come from, what's their -- you know, what's their story? Everybody has a story -- everybody. And in First Nation Communities, our stories are a lot more trauma, way more trauma than there should be.

Talking about being a Residential School Survivor and having parents of residential school survivors, Indian Day School -- yeah, that's my family two generations down. Residential school survivors, both on my dad's side -- both my dad and my grandparents. My mom, residential school survivor for life, went in at 6, came out at 16, got married, and had babies.

I love them all. I love them all, but the trauma that they have endured and the trauma that they have experienced have had ripple effects on our generations. And I'm sure that I've done that as well with my kids, so I don't try and sit

up here and say that I'm all fixed because I'm speaking about it and I can talk about it. That's not it. Just because I can talk about it doesn't mean I know what to do about it or how to address it or how I can help future generations.

I try to listen as much as I can. I try to take into consideration other people's feelings. I try to take into consideration my community as a whole, where they're coming from. I really try as hard as I can to try and provide care and try and put things in place, so when we say we need things in our community, I think that we go back to community.

I'm a firm believer that all the answers that we're looking for are within our communities, and what they need is unique to their own. And I think that we can listen to that. Having said that, I did say and I do say crisis team is huge. Policing that is -- I'm not saying that it shouldn't be RCMP, but I'm saying they should honour our laws, our communities, and the things that we believe in. And there should be support in place to make sure that those things happen. And somehow -- I don't know how to rebuild relationships with people who are in authority positions like RCMP, having spent a number of years trying to build relationships. And as fast as you get them, they're moved.

Children with special needs -- we say right off the hop they need consistency. They need that type of thing. I think that there's something to be said about consistency with relationship-building within the RCMP. You know, we say kids need consistency. Well, what about us? Are we just saying, just because we're adults, that we don't need consistency with those type of things? I think we would be kidding ourselves if we thought that that was what it was. So building relationships is really, really important. How that happens, I'm not quite sure.

I think that communities will be able to help do that. And I think it takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of work, but it also takes consistent work. The Commission is here now listening to this, but Sharon's definitely right. The trauma that our communities have already faced and have already endured at this point is huge.

Nova Scotia has -- I'm not trying to belittle this Commission or the experience of the people in Nova Scotia. I'm just saying our communities have faced trauma huge.

And when I say everybody has a story, everybody has a story. There is definitely a lot of trauma that people don't always talk about, and I think that if you don't always know -- it's a lot easier to say, "Okay, because I know what their trauma is, then I can be considerate of it." Well, I think Canada knows what our communities have been facing. It's not like they don't know what our traumas have been, so I think it's to be mindful about those type of things when you're considering it, because I think you already know there's things that should be done and need to be done but aren't being done.

I think that's -- I'm going to just leave it at that. Thanks.

MS. PHILIPPA PICTOU: Well, we came from a very emotional health directors' meeting this morning talking about exactly that same point, that communities have been -- sorry. I guess tears are contagious. Communities have been saying forever that we need that kind of support. Communities know what needs to happen, but there are no resources to do it. There are times when there's not even wood for sacred fires for people to just come together and provide that support during crisis.

And crisis -- well, right now the number of deaths that have happened over the last few weeks in communities have pretty well every health team in a crisis mode where it's impacting people directly. And people are coming to work but feeling in mourning, in grief, and not able to concentrate on doing things and having to show up.

There needs to be proper, adequate funding for all these things. We need healing centres. We're very excited about the resiliency centre that's coming up in Millbrook. We need that in every community. We need spaces for family treatment programs -- so that we can get at the root cause of violence and difficult situations -- that can support children being parented in their homes and staying in their

communities, all of those wraparound services that need to happen that everybody has been saying for years and years and years that we need, but we get caught between jurisdictional issues, between federal funding and provincial funding, and the feds saying that they do upstream.

It was pointed out today that truly providing services after a crisis is upstream because it's preventing the next crisis. I don't see that the government recognizes that. When there's a crisis, we have to go to other communities and try and get support. We've got Eskasoni that has the crisis team. They're stretched thin, and it's only this year that the province has given them any funding towards any of it. And that's minimal and with some strings attached. We need to have that kind of service in every community so that we can share the crisis team between communities so when it impacts one community, there are people who are able to go and respond and go to a different community and provide that support.

We also need to do mental wellness checks differently. That's something that comes up over and over again. People shouldn't die because someone is checking on them. We need to have a proper response service so if we have people that need a mental health check, we need to have somebody that goes along with the police that understands that person and has a way to be able to de-escalate a situation without having to shoot them. Even though that has happened in New Brunswick very recently, it has huge impacts on all the communities of feeling that kind of fear.

And the same thing with any kind of child welfare call. Then you end up with the police arriving as well, and that creates a fear. And often there isn't that kind of support for the families, and that kind of escalates the situation and makes things much worse. And it impacts all the communities every time that happens. I know we definitely need crisis response supports. That's all I'll say for now.

MS. SHARON RUDDERHAM: Okay. This is an important issue, I guess, for me. It has always been.

We know the root cause. We know the root cause of why this

happened. It was from trauma. That man was traumatized in his life, and the trauma was from undiagnosed mental illness and lack of treatment and lack of service. We have to deal with the traumas within First Nations communities.

And because First Nations communities have been dealing with this for eons, there are lots of models and examples that have been created from sparse funding, putting projects together, because none of it is sustainable, nothing.

So you know, Philippa referenced, you know, the Eskasoni crisis line was established because of traumas and experiences that occurred within Eskasoni. And that was the community's way to respond, was developing a 24/7 crisis line service.

It wasn't that in the beginning, and it was put together -- we always used to say, you know, "Strung together with buttons and dental floss," because resources are not there. You hear federal announcements, "Oh," you know, "those Indigenous people got millions of dollars coming to their aid, and funding is flowing," and whatever. But what you don't understand is that the bureaucracy takes at least half of that or more.

They made an announcement years ago around youth suicide prevention. What that translated into a community of 5,000 people in Eskasoni was $10,000.

Millions are being -- but that's only a drop in the bucket. When it translates into -- when it comes directly to community, there's, you know, over 600 First Nations communities in Canada, and that's -- I don't even know how many, like, with Inuit or other Indigenous populations.

The need for bringing services closer to community is essential because people cannot deal with their traumas or deal with their mental health issues if services are not available, and they need to be locally accessed, rurally accessed, not in main cities. Those institutions that exist, Nova Scotia Health Authority, IWK, whatever, you know, they're colonized institutions and they're not safe spaces for our

people. They don’t access their services.

And I can understand that from our -- you know, other populations, non-white populations are not safe in those environments.

There is a need for funding, sustainable funding, to provide both western and Indigenous approaches to treatment. It's a two-eyed seeing approach. We've learned that from Elder Marshall from Eskasoni, and his late wife Murdena.

We know that you have to look at both sides of a person's life, or you have to look at their whole being, that sometimes, yes, you need those western medical interventions to treat the traumas. But we also need culture. We also need tradition. We also need ceremony. We need crisis response.

Nova Scotia developed a emergency crisis line. Indigenous people don’t call there. You know why? You can't speak to them. Mi'kmaq is not a language that can be translated or offer translation services within Nova Scotia. You can offer services to every other culture that has come to this land, to -- the newest is Mandarin, the newest is whatever, you know, of people coming to this country, but those services are not available for the First Peoples of this country, and that applies right across this -- Canada. It's not just in -- well, maybe, I don't know. But I know in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and Atlantic, those services are not available. When people are in distress, they go to their first language. Those services, you cannot speak to a Mi'kmaq speaker.

That is why we developed the Eskasoni crisis line, because needed someone to call when they're in distress. They need to be able to vent. They need to be able to be guided. They need to be referred. They need to be hand held.

The colonized systems that are established are not safe spaces. Emergency rooms, hospital settings, all services, addiction services, have no supports or no safety for our people to access those services. We need healing centres. We need western services. We need clinical services. We need traditional services. We need so many services within our communities. And the models that are created, you know -- sorry -- they're our models. We've worked in -- you know -- we've talked about

this and the need for these services and the need for coming together and the need for collaboration amongst all providers, including police, including Child and Family Services, including, you know, health, including education. All of those, we all need to work together because we're all serving the same people, but all creating individual silos in their care.

I don't know how many people I've talked to in trying to address their addictions issues or their mental health issues, and they have 10 people that they're talking to, trying to seek healing and supports and care and treatment.

There is no comprehensive approaches that exist. We believe that's important in Indigenous communities, to be able to come together, to work together. I know that there's issues around privacy and confidentiality and all those kinds of things, but everybody knows what's going on, you know? Everybody sees it, everybody sees people that are suffering from mental illnesses or addictions issues. We see it every single day in our streets, in our communities.

But that's not my issue. People walk by. But that is your issue. They're human. It's been lost, the human connection. I always used to say that, "The humanity in health care is lost."

Maybe the humanity in policing services has been lost. It's all about process and structure and policies and standards and regulations and rules and you know, so many issues.

But anyway, I could probably go on forever, but anyway, I'll pass it on.

But there's a need. There are no mental -- there are -- you know, you talk -- and when I -- you know, I worked in Eskasoni. Okay. But Eskasoni has 5,000 people, and they have non-sustainable funding to support provision of mental health services or traditional services or anything along those lines. It comes from the government under a project, or if you submit a business case, or if you do all of these steps, maybe you'll get funded.

So you know, so much work needs to be done, and I don't know if this Mass Casualty is going to be able to make those recommendations, because it goes beyond federal. It goes beyond provincial. We need to talk about humanity.

Thank you.

MS. LAURIANNE SYLVESTER: Thank you, Sharon.

And Wela'lioq for your leadership in speaking up for our people.

You know, people have to understand the services that, you know, why we need these services, why we need our Indigenous people in these positions to help our people.

You know, I've been working at the university for a year now and part of my vision at the university is to help our Indigenous students get the help around mental health thatthey need. They need someone in there that's going to understand what they're going through, not to send them off to another mental health clinic where they have people there that are not trained and educated about the traumas that they're facing.

And I've been getting a little bit of pushback but in some parts of the university but some areas of the university, the Nancy Dingwall Mental Health Crisis Centre -- there is a director there. She is willing to help and put the funds there to provide us with the support to put into our Unama'ki College because I tried -- it took me a year now to explain that we can't take our students and say, "Okay, if you need mental health services, it's across the university. You have to go through here and then when you get there you're going to be welcomed by somebody who doesn't understand you. and what you're going through."

We can't do that to our students. We have to -- we have to hold their hands and help them and get the help they need. And that's what I feel is my part at the university, to do that. And I will work hard and that will be something that I will not leave the university until that's in place. And you know, the relationships within the university are important for them to understand that we need to work together, you

know, to provide those supports.

Back to our community, you know, if we asked everyone in this room right now to put your hand up if you know someone in the last week that committed suicide, I would say that just us here, Indigenous people, are going to be putting our hands up. If I asked you if you know anyone in the last month it will still be us putting our hand up.. I know two people who have committed suicide in the last two weeks. I know them very well. And not a lot of people can say that. We deal with that all the time.

Now, I taught a young student and that student -- I just happened to go on Facebook one night and it was about nine o'clock. And they goes by pronoun "they" -- they were on -- I'm still trying to get used to the pronoun thing. But they were on Facebook live and speaking almost in a way that, you know, they're giving up.

I was the only person listening. I had taught this child in Grade 3. I didn't know what to do. Like, I didn't know who to reach out to because we don't have that -- well, I'll just call this person. I'll call that person. But I couldn't do anything because I was on my phone trying to keep a conversation going so this person would not do anything to themselves.

So a few more people were getting -- coming on and listening. And we knew what was going on here. But also know that we don't have faith in the system that we can reach out to help this person.

As more people came on and had -- were, you know, communicating back to this person, I managed to reach out to the person's sister who I also taught. I said, "Can you do a wellness check at -- check with a couple of your family members?"

He was in the other room. They were in the living room. I didn't realize they were all in the same house. So I said, "Could you go in and see how your brother is doing?"

And then when the mom and the sister came into the room I could

see them come into the room and change the whole state of that person. And I knew that there was going to be help. But it was a scary thing because that's only five houses away from my house. I wanted to take my phone and go knock on the door and go see and make sure this person was okay. And you know, the thing is with people who have suicidal thoughts or tendencies, you know, what's there for them? Who's going to help them? You know?.

I think about when people go missing in our communities and how little the outside world is involved. You take, for example, Amber Kirwan from New Glasgow. I remember that so well. The whole world seemed to be looking for her, and of course, she's a girl, she's a person. We should all be doing that. Her face should be everywhere. Missing person.

I remember that so well. I remember her face. I remember the details. I followed it. But I don't know if it was shortly after that there was a girl in Eskasoni; her name was Terrilynn. When she went missing I don't remember a lot of stuff on the news. I don't remember a poster. I don't remember people coming together being very shooken up because of it. Why? Is it because she was First Nation? Is it because, you know, because she's from Eskasoni and that's not my community? That's not our responsibility? So why was the other girl?

And there's nothing against that family or anything like that. It was the approaches and all of the services around that, you know. But when it comes to our community members, it doesn't seem as important to the outside world. You know, it takes a while for the outside, you know, to react when it's one of our people. And that's -- you know, and it goes back to all the services.

And you know, Philippa, you mentioned about that, was it a federal thing? Is it a provincial thing? We're always caught in the middle and you know, "It's not our jurisdiction. It's not…" Who cares? We're all people. We all should be there to help one another and that's what we need more of. We need more people to come forward and we need to, you know, help one another. We need to build relationships

and help one another.

And we also need some suicide intervention, response to suicide. I know with my staff, we're having a First Aid trauma -- First Aid and Trauma -- I'm not sure what it's called. Bu yeah, Mental Health First Aid; thank you, Cheryl. So we have to do that. We had, you know, at the university my team deals with students on a day-to-day basis. And you know, within the first 30 days or 40 days of university, that's when students get really stressed. And it brings about those thoughts that "I'm not good enough. I can't do this."

And then they feel, you know, they get into those dark places. And so we're going to have that professional development for my staff because we had too many calls at the beginning of last year, at the first of the year of school. And you know, I have to teach my team that we -- we are not trained to do that. We have to be able to pass it on to the professionals. And that's why we need more of our people in those places so we can feel comfortable passing it on to the professionals because, naturally, we want to help and we want to fix it, which is what I did when I stayed on the call with that student of mine.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

I'm going to go to Karla.

MS. KARLA STEVENS: I just wanted to say that I've been working in the field of sexual violence and gender-based violence for the past seven years. It has been such a -- like a rollercoaster of emotions, of course, working in such a small, close-knit community like Paqtnkek, but to understand that, you know, building these relationships within the community and how I had nurtured them throughout the years was a lot of work just on myself. And, you know, knowing that the calls don't end at four o'clock, you know, they're coming all hours of the night, you know, there's so much domestic violence, there's addictions, there's just so many things that's happening within our community that is so out of our reach which is sometimes enraging for people who work, obviously, in this field, like myself.

We just feel that departments are obviously overworked. You know, there couldn't be just one person per department. It just doesn't make sense. We talk a lot about informal supporters when we did do the Sexual Violence Project where informal supporters were our mothers, you know, our aunts, our sisters, our cousins. These are people that we were confiding in because we didn't have the actual supports on hand or didn't feel comfortable those supports at, you know, health centres or, you know external places like the Women's Centre that's only 14, 15 kilometres from our community. There was a huge, huge distrust. There's a huge, you know, confidentiality, like they had mentioned before, you know, breaches in confidentiality within communities which wasn't a good thing for people who are survivors of, like, gender-based violence and sexual violence who are, you know, continuing to be violated in so many ways.

I got a call of domestic violence a few weeks ago where the woman who was beaten pretty badly decided to call me first instead of the RCMP so her kids would be exited from the house before they came because she didn't want to lose her children because that would be the number one priority. She would be beaten half to death before she would even call the cops, which is so alarming to me, to think about how women are put in these situations and how they get themselves out them, like how resilient and how strong they are by knowing that they have to do anything to protect their families and that's just -- you know, that's not something that we should be dealing with. You know, Children's Services is a huge issue in every First Nation's community where they're coming into our community and telling us how to raise our children, you know, how to care for our children. And these are things that were taken from us that we are trying to relearn and try to regain, you know, as community members.

And like Juliana had mentioned before, we have gone to community recommendations. We go to the community because they know what they need. They know what they want. And it's not the same for every community but it does trickle down to for us to understand, you know, that these bigger departments like

health, and housing, and addiction, it can't be just one person housed in these departments. They -- you know, they suffer from burnout. They have families of their own and they're trying to go above and beyond for other communities to -- just to get them up to par of understanding of how to support someone else.

We talk a lot about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We've talked about human trafficking. You know, there's so much things we could talk about for the role in isolated communities like our own and how we're suffering. And you know, they had talked about crisis and, you know, crisis teams, addiction teams but, you know, in these one, tiny communities, we get one person to serve everybody, which is not fair to that one person.

You know, in my work right now, I have a team of five. You know, we bounce ideas off of each other on how to respond to sexual violence and gender-based violence as a group, you know. And this hard work for just one person. I think community needs to realize that the informal supporters within First Nations communities are the ones who are taking most of this one. And, you know, it's a lot of people that don't get to unpack a lot of this stuff and they have to take it home every night and, you know, there's no way to, you know, support these people that are dealing with domestic violence and, you know, the historical trauma that does need to be unpacked. You know, we need to feel the impacts of everything that is happening and, you know, not just for Indigenous people by for BIPOC people as well.

You know, it's just we need bigger teams of support to support the supported that are on the ground right now that are doing the service providers work, that are, you know, willing to help community members when they are in distress. There's so many things that are in our community and, like people have mentioned before, we're on projects that are limited. We have limited funding. My project is up in 18 months. You know, there's just limited funding for this right now.

And, like, how it's going to continue on and how it's going to self-sustain itself, we're currently working on a peer-support model which is being

implemented in Canso at the moment. So we're just trying to identify how the peer-support model would help within the community and for people to identify their own supports and their own -- like, their own talents and what they bring to the table. So it's really a refreshing way of moving and identifying, like, the champions for our community, and highlighting the work that they do, and how we can support them in that work.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Karla.

Tuma?

MR. TUMA YOUNG: Well, Sharon, I'm just going to direct this, basically, to the Commissioners here.

Commissioners, you're listening to very raw and frustrated folks from the Indigenous groups. And every single one here in the circle, I've worked with. For many years, we've tried to do many things. Like, one, I'm pretty sure Sharon knows, was buttons and, you know, dental floss. We've done many things over the last 34 years together in one form or capacity and we always jump from thing.

But I'm reminded, as you're listening to the stories here -- and the folks who are watching, or listening, or this is going to be part of, they're going to wonder, what does this have to do with the incident at Portapique? I'm reminded of a time that I once went -- and I'm going to tell you a few stories, I guess, you know, and they're kind of metaphors. I was once at an RCAP, the Royal Commission on the Aboriginal Peoples hearings. This was set up after the issue -- or the incident at Oka, you know, and the land things, et cetera, back in 1990s, early-1990s.

So we had our Royal Commission on Aboriginal People and one of our Mi'kmaq elders was a commissioner on that, and that was Viola Robinson. And we were listening and we were -- she was asking us about solutions but everyone in the group was talking about how difficult it was, what's the rates of suicide, the '60s scoop, the traumas, et cetera. And halfway through, Viola got a little bit frustrated with us and she said, "Listen, I've heard it all. I know it all. We've gone through all across the

country and every single meeting, we heard about the stats about suicide. We've heard the stats about plans. We heard it all in all the jurisdictions. We know those things. So what I'm looking for is solutions."

And then one little old elder said, "We're not done talking about this. Until we're done, then we can tell you the solutions."

So when you're listening to folks venting -- and this doesn't necessarily have to apply to Indigenous people only. I'm sure as the families of the folks who were murdered in Portapique and elsewhere, they are probably frustrated. They're telling you stories. They're crying. They're emotional, you know. The solutions will come once that all is done, you know, and they're ready to move to the next stage. Until we are ready to move to the next stage, we'll have to do this, right?

But I want to come back to you in your work. Really, what the theme is coming from this, as I've heard from all the speakers here, is relationships. And when I'm thinking about stuff, and I'm listening to folks, and I'm looking at them, you know, the Mass Casualty Inquiry and the work it has to do in investigating, really, I go back to my foundational place which is, when there's been a break in a relationship, I look towards our treaties. Our treaty relationships need to be part of this. And some people may wonder, what does treaties have to do with this? Well, those treaties also belong to all Nova Scotians, not just L'nus. That's why we say the phrase "We are all treaty people". So the victims and the families, those are all treaty people. And there is no doubt in my mind -- and I'm pretty sure the commissioners have already heard this -- that there's an issue with the RCMP. And the whole issue is larger. It's policing. It's how we want our communities to be safe.

It would appear there's been a major break in the relationships between Nova Scotians, probably Canadians, and our institutions, and primarily in this case, the institutions that were supposed to keep us safe, secure, comfortable, which are policing, whether it's RCMP, whether it's municipal police forces, whether it's Indigenous members of tribal police forces. So there's been a bit of a major break there

and we're examining this. That's probably one of the major issues here.

What you're listening is L'nus. We know and we have experienced these major breaks. We've experienced many traumas over the years. We have experiences of them. One thing we have not been able to do is create a long-term strategy, a vision, a dream -- and maybe it is -- where basically the Mass Casualty Commission is going to be looking at, where do we want Nova Scotia to be? Where do we want to go? What is it that we need to do and how do we get there? And the dream is to make Nova Scotia a better place to live, no matter what, and for everyone, including L'nu people.

Unfortunately, what has happened has resulted in many Nova Scotians experiencing a deep trauma, one that most Nova Scotians have not really experienced as L'nu. We've experienced lots of traumas, right? And then there is a relationship breakdown and they're asking the questions: "Where were the police?"; "Why wasn't I protected?"; "How could this happen in Nova Scotia?" That's an awful good question we're asking ourselves.

And then what is it that we're looking for? Is it community-based policing? Is it increased resources? Is it a different type of policing? Really, I guess in some ways we have an opportunity here to re-examine how we want to police our communities, whether they're Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

And I'm also reminded, part of the issue also is -- and I'll give you another story, an example, that happened to me. Early on, when I was at CBU, when I first started there about 10 years ago, we had a threat come there, because the internet was new, social media, et cetera. Several of the students at Unama'ki College, they chuckled and I said, "Well, what's on?" I thought it was a joke, a meme, or something like, and they said, "Oh, somebody is threatening to bring a gun to CBU." And I'm like, "Show me." And I immediately took action. I reported that. And there's a leadership vacuum. I wasn't trained for anything, and I took it to the people that I thought would be -- we didn't have a plan. How do you plan for something that you never think will

happen? But we as lawyers, we're supposed to plan for all this, the what ifs, right -- we tell people. We didn't have a plan. The leadership was running around, pardon the pun. It appeared to be a type of "s" show.

And so I kicked in, with my trauma-based training, and I locked my younger students in a thing, and I prepared a way out. And I said, "There's an escape route over here" and stuff like this. "Here's how we close the curtains. Here's how you stay quiet" and everything like that. The leadership was caught scrambling. People didn't know. The security, the Cape Breton Regional Police -- nobody had a plan to deal with this. "An active shooter at Cape Breton University? What? No, that happens in American states."

And even dealing with the aftermath of that -- it turned out to be one of our students. How do we help the student become a productive member of our society and not give up on a person? And we did that, and instead of a punitive model or anything like that, we focused on, what does this person need? Why did they do what they had to do? There were many mistakes made. Now I'm pretty sure CBU has a plan, and I'm pretty sure the RCMP and other policing people now have a plan, well, if anything like this happened again -- but we have.

The Portapique -- we expected our leaders and the police to step up and be able to walk us through, comfort us, to help us, and to keep us safe, and that trust was eroded there because we didn't know and they didn't know. They were not trained properly where we as Nova Scotians can be supported and kept safe.

So I go back to the relationships, our treaty relationships. Now, if you look at this feather that's going around, I immediately notice that it's a feather from a fairly young eagle. It's not fully white. There's white on it and stuff. That tells me that it's transforming into the eagle it's going to be. And I use that as a metaphor for the Mass Casualty Commission. That eagle is transforming Nova Scotia, our relationship with the institutions of policing.

And the bigger and larger question is, how do we as Nova Scotians

-- as L'nus, how do we want to be treated and policed and kept safe? Well, community-based policing. We have lots of models that we can look at. I know that people have talked about defunding the police or other things and adding social workers to wellness calls, et cetera. Well, I don't think we can ever get rid of policing, but the type, the model, going forward -- and that's where I get really excited about this opportunity that we have here, where the Mass Casualty Commission will be able to really -- really are going to be able to transform our communities in Nova Scotia in how we want to be kept safe.

However, I'm also looking at some others things. And you probably have heard from Jane McMillan and others. L'nus have had -- we have a history of reports, commissions, et cetera, and I'm going back just to the ones in Nova Scotia -- the recommendations coming from Donald Marshall Jr., the wrongful conviction report. Many of those are still unfulfilled. In the RCAP, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, there was a whole section, a chapter, devoted to justice, and one of the phrases used is "justice as healing". The only surprising thing about RCAP was how quickly it was shelved. Then we have a whole section dealing with policing and the relationships between government institutions in the TRC, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the calls to action, and more recently the calls to justice under the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry.

There are many problems. There are many incidents that have happened. Even around that time, we have had several incidents of wellness checks gone badly wrong. They've gone very wrong and L'nus ended up dead. This has been a history for us here, even in Nova Scotia – looking at the Simon case in Qalipu, et cetera, or Paul in Truro -- wellness checks.

And I got back to the larger context of our legal system and our justice system. Sometimes the two are together and sometimes they're not. And the history of policing in our communities has been rocked with many difficulties. The justice file has been a very difficult file for L'nus.

And it also is very poor profile for (Native word) for the non-native community. What we know is justice, you know? Probably we're on the cusp of, need to think about what does reformation look like? It used to be a long time ago, I'd tell people, you know, "We -- in the punishment coercive model, we moved away from punishing the body, and now we're not punishing the body."

Mind, there's also all sorts of stuff there. I am looking at some of our history. We used to have special constables in our communities, people who were just picked for their size and ability to break up a fight. But they were among us, and they managed to know the community, and they knew who was and who wasn't and how they could handle them and often, many of these L'nus special constables never even had a gun. We didn't need one, and maybe there were only one or two.

Yes, they worked very hard and they brought a lot of resource, but they kept it there. Our communities were relatively safe. Yes, there was disputes that happened to people, but you know, stuff like this, but for generally speaking, you know, I'm looking at -- for many, many years, there was only two special constables in Eskasoni.

And then you had the tribal police force, an exciting time, you know, type of thing. But the tribal police force was severely underfunded, so they couldn't do the job. And I've heard, you know, the stories about some of the constables which were trained at RCMP depot in Regina was paid so lowly that they almost relied on food banks. That's not how you want your police to be, right?

And then the RCMP, and we need to -- or municipal police officers, in many communities, right? And sometimes I look and I think, what is that balance we're looking for now? In many communities, it could be the fact that we're over-policed.

There have been many instances of people, reports, talking about how if you're in the Vancouver downtown east side, there's cops on every single corner ... every hundred feet ... run into a cop, police officer, any size.

In Eskasoni, they moved to a 24-hour policing. At one point, there were 17 RCMP officers stationed in Eskasoni. That's a lot of RCMP officers for a small town, 5,000 people, 24 hours.

They didn't change. They didn't amount to -- they didn't make this community safe. And they're saying no at this point, you know?

We're just dealing with this situation now. Complaints against the RCMP and what being asked, how does one make those?

And I'm telling folks, well, how to, you know?

We need to look at -- and other things, like, when your dreams of justice institute, we had a justice incident came up, and court workers; however, those justice and legal files have been a very elusive dream around those.

When we see a justice as healing or healing as justice, that means something, and I think we're finding that in the larger community in Nova Scotia, that the justice file was also a very difficult file to try and grasp -- and but the communities communes justice as healing and even -- or you know, or you can flip it around, healing as justice. We need this.

It's -- but I'm also very cognizant of telling folks, the law is a very dull knife in which to cut away societal problems; however, it's often the only knife we have. It hacks, it tears, it doesn't do the job, but it sometimes does cut.

We look at those principles, those -- the Seven Grandfather teachings, the promise of a wonderful community, you know, in the large (audio skip). Those principles are just as much applicable to non-indigenous communities as they are to our own communities, right?

However, sometimes we react, you know? We need -- if the Mass Casualty Commission can do something is to ensure that we'll never get rid of policing and I don't think we should anyways, but we can make it proactive to prevent problems from occurring in the first place rather than reacting to them.

I mean, there is still a need for reaction, but right now, it seems we

reacted, and when you don't have a plan, you react very badly.

That's -- we, in some ways, there needs to be a renewal of the relationships between those institutions of governance and justice and legal and policing with the citizenry of Nova Scotia, Canada, and in First Nations communities and the Indigenous people. That's what we really need. Wela'lin.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Tuma.

Commissioner, if you don't mind, I think we'll take a few minutes quick break and just let everybody get up and take a breath and stretch for a minute, and then we'll come back.

--- Upon recessing at 3:44 p.m.

--- Upon resuming at 3:57 p.m.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: We're going to start the next round, and I'm just going to add a little context in before, and I'm going to give everybody an opportunity to share what you -- if that you wanted something that you wanted to share that you haven't had an opportunity, or something that's came up, or something you thought about during this session. This will be our last round because the Commissioners do have a family to meet with later this afternoon. But I wanted to kind of just talk a little bit about Indigenous voice and Indigenous representation is -- there's lots of great initiatives, and one of the things I talk about, like, from a municipality context is we have a public safety office, we have a public safety officer that's for the new immigrant community, we have one that's from the African Nova Scotian community, but we don't have one that's an Indigenous representative. We don't have any public safety officers that are working within the city context that specializes in Indigenous communities.

And it's the same thing that happens all the time. They think if you have one person, that they can do everything, and I always give that example. They think I am an expert in culture, language, protocols, and policy development, and everything. And -- but that's not really how it is. I rely on my elders for protocols, and I

rely on other experts. And I think you need to realize that, everybody needs to realize that, that if we're saying that we need a public safety officer in a community, it needs to be in every community, because each community is unique, and it's not fair that we're always continuously getting, "Oh, there's one in -- public safety officer for all of the 13 First Nations communities," when each community has different issues and different perspectives, and different priority areas.

And I wouldn't -- I would do it injustice if I was going to go to Eskasoni and say, "I know all about your safety issues," and make a plan for them without their community input and their guidance. So that needs to be really stressed very much so that anything that's done, you need to take in to respect that even if it's a small community of 300 people, that community is very unique and has their own priorities and own leadership, and they're a unique structure, and we need to really honour that.

And when I hear things like, the Indigenous voice, this group here is a very vocal group, but the majority of Indigenous people you meet are very quiet and timid. They'll be in sessions and they'll feel not as comfortable.

And I give the example for a lot of people is that it's -- you live in a community where you're surrounded with people who look like you, who talk like you, who understand the same things as you, and then every day you need to leave your community and go into this big world that you don't see yourself. I always say I feel like Tigger working in the municipality. Am I the only one, because until Jerid started working with us, that's what I felt like. I haven't, to this day, run into another Indigenous person, and when I did, she was there for two weeks and then gone. So you feel like that.

And Indigenous voice, like, has -- sometimes we're not as loud as protesters or that. Like, when we advocate for defund the police, the City was very strong with defund the police, defund the police.

So that money went towards anti-racism for Black community, not

for Indigenous community, when we even experience racism for years and years and years before any settler communities came to our shores.

The racism starts with us, and it should have designated funding that goes along with it as well, just not anti-Black racism.

So with that, I'm going to -- that was one of my last things I wanted to add in, and I'll pass it on.

DR. EMMA CUNLIFFE: Cheryl, thank you. I'd like to say thank you to you for wonderful facilitation today. It's been a real gift and you've been very generous with your time. Elder Marlene, you started by saying that this feather is perfect. And I think Tuma demonstrated that for us. And so thank you. It was such a nice way to open the circle and then to return to that point.

Sharon, I wanted -- I want to thank all of you for your comments but Sharon, when you were talking about the lack of Mi'kmaq language services, particularly for mental health crisis, I was thinking of Donald Marshall Jr., having been interviewed by the police in English, tried in English, his appeal conducted in English. And it was only when he got to the Commission and was able to testify in Mi'kmaq that any part of his truth truly started to emerge. And how transformative that was for the Commission and for the work that the implementation tripartite commission did in the wake of that.

So it’s worrying to hear that the significance of Mi'kmaq language services still hasn’t fully landed. And so thank you for sharing that story.

It’s been an honour to sit in circle with you all today. Thank you.

ELDER MARLENE COMPANION: I sat here and I listened and I learned. I learned so much this afternoon and this morning that my heart feels full and my mind is going to blow up. I’m sure.

But Sharon hit the nail right on the head. Within the first few minutes she said the whole reason that the Portapique incident happened was number one, the medical issue that turned into a mental issue which turned into a violence against two partners and probably violence against everyone in his life.

And everyone spoke about our violences that we have had, each different but each alike. And I sat here and I thought, you know, it's wonderful that the reserves have a medical clinic and each of them can treat the members of that community the way that they need to be treated medically but it's not enough.

And then you have the Friendship Centre here in Halifax that's in the process of opening up their new medical centre. And you know, they have a lot of great plans and they have a lot of brand new money that's going to put that centre on the map. But it you look at the medical system here in Nova Scotia, and the hospitals, it's not enough. It's not enough doctors. It's not enough psychiatrists. It's not enough people that can help women and children and even men. You know, men are not immune to violence, even sexual violence, and two-spirited people and things.

I think the biggest thing that we can take from today is that our medical system needs more money. We need more people that are trained. And I know that this is not the 1950s, and a lot of our young people are leaving the reserve, keeping their status, and are going to university. And they're coming out doctors, and lawyers, and possibly Indian chiefs, if I can use that old phrase.

And it's our children that are going to university that's going to help this medical system here in Nova Scotia to improve. But without people like this Inquiry and the three of you putting a recommendation forward, our governments, no matter who they are, whether it's, you know, an independent person that lives in the woods down by Yarmouth, our politicians are not going to do anything. They say they don't have the money.

But I think that if they took it from things that they don't need to put it to where we do need, and take some of the -- down some of the barriers to get people into the medical field and to actually practise, that there would be more help for people who have physical ailments., mental ailments, and possibly emotional ailments that would cause them to be so violent against other people.

This morning we talked about guns and the impact of them. And

we all concluded that at a young age our children should be introduced to guns and the violence and you know, how to take care of a gun, and be trained on guns. It's a wonderful idea if it works the way that I see it working in my head. It will be a wonderful thing that too will cut down on gun violence and deaths through that.

I just think that everyone here has contributed so much and you all have been so patient and everybody's sitting here so quietly listening. Without this group of people we'd still be back saying, "Well, what happened? What can we do?"

But by bringing Indigenous voices in, I think that we've been heard here today, ladies.

MS. JULIANA JULIAN: I guess this is -- I guess I just want to say thanks for allowing me to participate today. There's so much that's been said. Tuma and I sat here and listened and I wanted to just close my eyes and really listen, so much more in depthly and think about it, just because to me it just -- like, just thinking about RCMP and what it really meant and there is so much more to that discussion than what you -- I know you had a lot to say but there was so much more going on in my head when I thought about it.

And where to start, I don't even want to go there. I'm not trying to make anything more of it than what you made of it because you did such an awesome job talking about it.

Karla, thanks for bringing up the support for supporters. I often forget some of the work that we've done in our communities. We've done some pretty damn good stuff. Sharon made a comment about making do with dental floss and buttons. Yea, that's -- and we've taken projects that that's not what their intention was, and what came out of it was what community was saying. When we did the sexual violence project they basically said, "We're not going to go to the RCMP if we're a victim of sexual violence. We're not going to go to a rape crisis line. We'll probably go to the same nurse to get checked but highly unlikely." That's only if it's unknown kind of thing or it's a date rape type of thing. That's pretty much what came out of it.

And they said that they were going to go to family members because that's who they trust. So community members trust other community members and that goes back to a lot of what Tuma was mentioning, what Sharon was mentioning, Philippa. Community members trust community members. And one of the things that really worried us about it when we started doing that was we needed to make sure that they had some type of training so that they knew and felt confident about the fact that they were able to provide some support for people in sexual violence.

And I think that our communities, when we talk about those crisis groups and those crisis response teams in our communities, they can do so much more to provide trust and support and make those links outside of our communities if we give them the opportunity.

And Cheryl, when you were talking about being that only person, I feel like when there's different things going on within, I'm going to use the example, long-term care facilities, okay, they need to keep some of our elders in those facilities. They're not overly friendly. So then they ask, how can they make it more culturally -- that's just like a loaded question. It's no different than asking, how can you make a hospital more -- I know I shouldn't be laughing but I feel like it's so ironic to say, "How can you make a hospital more safe for First Nation's people?" when it's a matter of seeing us there, respecting us there. The simple things like that, they're just not happening. I'd love for it to happen but it's not happening.

And each time when we go through different situations -- Mass Casualty Commission, TRC, Response to TRC -- it's the same thing. We're saying the same thing over, and over, and over again. And I don't mean to be disrespectful to anybody who's participating in this but I think it's been said, and it's great that people are saying where there heart is and where it's coming from, but it would nice to see true things happening as a result of what's been said.

When I think about some of what's been happening, and what we're talking about, and what we're hoping to accomplish from this Commission, I think

of the Marshall, and I think of the review that they did afterwards, and I think of -- I can still remember Jane McMillan presenting and it was as though discussions were happening to try and change the way it was worded, or the way it was written, whatever.

But having participated in at least three of them and only by coincidence, not on purpose -- I wasn't stalking her -- I -- it was very much what the communities were saying and I felt like it was a repeat. And as a young person at that time, I was so, "Oh, I'm" -- like, "It's so exciting. You're going to listen and they're going to do something. And now they're reviewing it so now they're going to see what was accomplished and what wasn't, and they're going to do all this." And that's not necessarily the way it rolled out.

And I think of myself, as a new health director 20-some years ago, and Sharon saying, "Just wait. You trust them but just wait." And I'm, like, with my little eyes up, "Really?" and thinking that yes, we're going to make changes, and here we are, it's almost 30 years later, and we're still arguing about the same thing for homecare, the same thing for, you know, mental wellness -- the mental wellness teams, whatever it is, prenatal, all the things that communities have been crying about. So when I look at this, I feel very privileged to be part of it but I also feel like we should not forget about the fact that the information is out there and we have been told, and you have been told, not necessarily you directly, but the information is there that says what communities think, and what communities have experienced, and what things need to be done. And I guess that's it. Thanks.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Juliana.

MS. PHILIPPA PICTOU: On that note, maybe one of the recommendations needs to be, implement the TRC. Implement the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, and implement the RCAP. All those things that have been said before need to actually be followed through with and put in place. I know we've made some progress on some of them but there's a lot more work to do.

When Tuma was policing, it reminded of something that hadn't

been talked about before and that's -- you know, there have been some amazing Indigenous RCMP officers who really, really do great things in the community doing community policing, especially around work with youth and things but they're not actually supported to do that the way that the RCMP works so that, you know, they get pulled out of meetings with community in order to go an do traffic tickets up the road kind of thing, traffic stops. It's super frustrating for both the community -- especially small communities that only have one RCMP officer who's part of that community but they're also part of the other larger force in nearby communities and so they get pulled in several directions at once. And it really breaks the trust in those relationships in the community when they're working really hard to kind -- do community work and build trust with youth and do really important things that make a difference for the safety of the community and the future of those youth as they grow up.

So I think there needs to be some better supports put in place around Indigenous police officers, whether they're RCMP or community, you know, regional police, or however, because that type of policing actually can make a big difference toward prevention and support for people and building trust when dealing with difficult situations. So I think that's an important piece that needs to be looked up and implement all the previous recommendations that everybody has spent hours making. If we can do one thing, that would be an amazing thing.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Philippa.

MS. SHARON RUDDERHAM: I do like the reference Tuma talked about around the broken relationship. You're now understanding broken treaties and the broken relationships that occurred between Indigenous people and others, settlers who came to this country. That relationship has been broken for centuries and nothing has been done -- or very little has been done to repair that relationship. And I give you all the hope in the world to hopefully work toward repairing those broken relationships but I also want to talk about a couple other things.

I wonderer, you know, during the days of the event that happened

here in Nova Scotia, whether or not there was issues around access to cell service, whether there was issues to access around internet services. That is a serious issue in Nova Scotia. For rural communities, for Indigenous communities, there is no access to internet to call for help. You cannot call for help without those services if there's no access to internet, there's access to cell services. You can have all the lines you have established but, if those services don't exist, we're being monopolized by these mass corporations who are dictating whether or not services are provided to rural communities and to smaller communities. They focus on mass populations in big cities where they can make the most buck.

There should be standards put in place. What does CRTC do? Put in a standard that it needs to be a basic service available to everyone, and it needs to be affordable. First Nations communities have the highest rates of poverty in Nova Scotia. We know that -- we hear a lot about coal mines shutting down, industry shutting down, and poverty being -- Nova Scotia, a have-not province dealing with all kinds of poverty issues, access to services, transportation. We don't have public transportation systems. In the city, you do. They don't exist. So look at other areas.

Look at -- you know, it's more -- there's not just a simple fix as far as, you know, I'm concerned.

There needs, you know -- people often talk about, you know -- here is a need for emergency and safety supports and services and programs and education and everything around that whole topic. Those don't exist in Indigenous communities for the most part. Some communities may have them.

EAP services for employees -- those don't exist in Indigenous communities. Some may have them. The majority do not. So you talk about the need for EAP services for policing, EHS, Fire. We need those EAP services for everyone, for all service providers who are dealing with trauma, with violence, with lateral violence, with, you know -- and I guess another -- you know, so those going back to the points we made earlier around the need for more services and bringing those services closer to

communities, not in Halifax or not in wherever. The cities -- communities need those services as well. Rural communities need those services.

Another thing, I can't leave here and not comment around police training which is shocking. I didn't know how long it took to become a policeman, but I googled it. And it said six months. And I was shocked because they are dealing with life and death situations. And any other help profession that deals with life and death situations, whether they're a registered nurse, physician, LPN, CCA, morticians take two years. It takes two years to become a mortician to deal with dead people. But yet it's only six months to become a police officer?

Holy mackerel. That is insane. Literally insane that you're giving police officers guns and powers and authorities and nurses and health professionals and whatever, you know, they don't have a -- well, yeah, okay, maybe they can, but you know, they don't have -- you know, there needs to be a change in that whole system. How can you -- they can't -- they're not adequately trained. And I know they say, "Oh, well, if they become a detective then they've got to go for more training." I'm like, "Holy mack." And it takes how long to become a physician? Ten years or something? I don't know.

But you know, it's -- I was really mortified by that fact that it only takes six months of training to become a police officer, to be able to shoot people or whatever, you know? And I know they don't want to shoot people. You know, I don't want to be flippant or whatever, you know. Like, how much, you know, a paramedic is what? A year training? I don't know. Anyway, I just needed to address that, that serious changes need to happen at all levels across this country.

I even Googled, "What are the safest countries in the world?" Canada's not on that list. Are we looking at other countries to see what they're doing? How are they making their country safer? What are they -- what can we learn from that? I'm sure there's been tons of research done on it.

I also want to talk about -- often when you hear there's issues with

any kind of policing events or things that go on or things that go wrong or whatever else, you hear the police saying, “CERT. CERT” or something that's called CERT, I think, is involved. And CERT will do the investigation. And CERT will make the recommendations.

Is CERT arm’s length? Is CERT separate completely? Or are there ties? Is the police investigating police? I don't know. I’m just thinking of concepts like whistleblower concepts, ombudsman concepts, you know. What -- is there someone that you can call? Nobody knows to call CERT. Or nobody knows to call whoever. You know, where do people call? People witness abuses that go on on a regular basis in our Indigenous communities and outside of our Indigenous communities where people have done wrong.

What kind of system is out there to support people who come forward with witnessing these events or being involved in these events? And what kind of supports can we build around those?

I know that Tuma referenced several reports and stuff but I also to remember to reference Joyce Echaquan and the impacts of Joyce Echaquan’s experience, and the recommendations that came out of Quebec, because they’re dealing with a lot of the same topic areas as well, with police gone wrong and breakdown in relationships and again, colonized institutions not supporting people who are in need, people that are in urgent situations, you know.

So there’s been so many reports that have been done that nothing has been done to respond to those reports. And I'm really afraid that this report that’s going to be done from the Mass Casualty Commission is going to sit on the shelf. Some things might get done. Some things might not get done.

Who decides that? The federal government? The provincial government? Parties could change. We could have an election. Who’s to say that they’ll think it’s a priority to -- that’s our life. We have presented it to governments, every government, every political party. But if it’s not a priority for that political party it

doesn't get supported. It doesn't get addressed.

I also want to talk about -- we want to talk about solutions. I talked about the need to build those capacities. But I also need to talk about -- you know, we talked about sexual violence and the response that women or others, you know, have experienced when going to seek for help, or when mental health people who are dealing with mental health issues, or when people are seeking help in any way. It seems that every door is the wrong door. No, you have to go here. No, you have to go over to there. No, you have to go see them. I can refer you over there to them. Every door needs to be the right door.

And those pathways need to be built. Remove the jurisdictional divides. It's about providing care to people. It's not about who is going to pay. It's not about -- it's not about the budget. It's about real services. It's about real supports to be provided to the person who is dealing with a crisis.

I could -- I was going to talk about another example but I think I'll just leave it at there because I was going to go on and talk about other things. But I think I'll just leave it at there that there's so many other factors that impact how and why people access supports, and as far as I'm concerned, it's not somebody else's responsibility; it's your responsibility if you're dealing with that individual. And going back to my idea, every door needs to be the right door. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Sharon.

MS. LAURIANNE SYLVESTER: Wow. I have lots of things going through my head right now, because we all make connections to what Sharon says. I like what you said about every door has to be the right door. We get bounced all over the place. Who's going to pay for that, you know? We have to start looking at the person and what's going on there and how we can help.

I was thinking a lot about the training for the police, and what was going through my mind is how much of that six months is devoted to teaching those cadets about Indigenous people and what we've been through, about racism,

discrimination, about cultural safety -- so many different things besides how to hold the gun and how to shoot it. I know it's more than that, but I'm thinking as we move further and further one into dealing with things in society -- and things have changed -- then why did that period of time for training not change? Because we are expecting the police to learn more, why hasn't that changed? Has the program been the same as it has been 30 years ago? I hope not, because it should change. Even with our nursing program and our idea of a medical school at Cape Breton University, we are focused on cultural safety because of how our people have been treated in the health system, not just the policing and with the law, but through going to hospitals and being treated a certain way.

Another thing that came to my mind was the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. How much of that is discussed in your own departments where you work? Does that come up, that conversation about what responsibilities we have in this province? Because we are all treaty people. We all have a responsibility. There's all different calls under health and justice and education and child welfare. There's all different areas that we can all be part of to achieve those calls to action. But those calls to action were developed in I think it was 2015, and from 2015 to 2019, none of those calls to action were achieved. I think there was none -- or there was a few achieved that time, but none in 2020. And then in 2021, when the mass graves had been discovered, all of a sudden people are pulling together panicking: "We need to do these. We need to achieve these calls to action."

And it's a shame that we're not having those conversations enough. The structural changes are the ones that are more meaningful, not the symbolic changes. And it's the low-lying fruit that everybody wants to check off. And it's not a checklist as well. It's not a checklist for us to say, "Okay, we did that. We put the flag up -- check." We have to stop doing that. We have to look at real, structural change that requires resources and funding and that's sustainable. And we have that report, but we have to be taking that report seriously in all sectors: universities, government,

everywhere, in the health care system.

I'm trying to push that at Cape Breton University, but I can't do it alone. Like Cheryl said, we're expected to do a lot of the work in our own communities, and people expect us to do the work. Well, there's a term called "emotional labour", and our people are exhausted from trying to fix things that we didn't break. Here we are working and we're exhausted. I look at Sharon. I look at all those years of being a voice for our Mi'kmaq Indigenous women leaders, and I see the exhaustion, because we have to say things not once, not twice to be heard. I've said so many things at the university; it's probably the fourth or the fifth time that I'm heard. But I keep saying it, but I feel exhausted from saying it. So when it comes to services and support for our people in our communities, when we say that we need support in an area, we are saying it for a reason. We are saying it because we need that support. We shouldn't have to say it over and over and over again, and that's where the problem is.

This situation, the Portapique incident, that could happen anywhere because there's so many people who are faced with mental health, PTSD, and more and more every day. More and more every day we're dealing with that, and it's like a time bomb that could just go off at any time in any of our communities. I mean, how many times do you go out of your house and you walk into somebody who's just faced with some challenges and you're wondering what that person is thinking, or if they're a danger to themselves or to society? That's the scary part. You know, we just don't know who is sitting next to us. You don't even know what's going to happen to yourselves, if you're going to have a breakdown. It could be you.

I also wanted to mention one thing about -- I know Sharon wrote that down, but our First Nation community runs through -- it's the hub of Sydney now, and we're happy to say -- we're very proud to say that we are the hub of Sydney. But yet, the public transit bus does not come through our community. Figure that out. It goes from down on Kings Road, where the harbour is, all the way through all of the health park and up to the regional hospital, and they don't put a bus there. So nothing

has changed in the CBRM as far as public transit. It's unfortunate because it's a main artery now, that road. But they may put it in because we have many people other than us using it.

I wanted to mention one more thing. Cheryl, you mentioned about there's no people in place who do certain things. We experience that at Cape Breton University too with recruitment with students. We don't have our own recruiter to recruit our student, but yet they have recruiters all over the place for international students and for other provinces. But yet, in our own province, we don't have an actual recruiter at Cape Breton University to promote education and to recruit our Indigenous students. So there's lots of different services that we don't have. I know we sound like we're venting, but you know what? When we have a microphone, we let everyone know, you know? And some people don't know what we face in our communities. We know, because we talk all the time, and we tell the same stories all the time sometimes because we're frustrated. Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Laurianne.

Karla.

MS. KARLA STEVENS: Yeah. I'm just going to kind of mock what everybody else is saying within this. Within my own organization and institutes that I have been working in, they all needed to be on board with the cultural competency where we had did some training for some of the service providers within the Antigonish Humans Resource Centre on intergenerational trauma and the impacts that is happening to community members and people that they work with on a daily basis.

But to better understand how to approach these Indigenous people and you know, kind of meeting them where they're at, we did some training with Michael R. Denny, who had worked closely with survivors from the residential school for many years, and he had did a presentation for our organization, and I think we had 27 people on there, and after it was done, I got so many emails from people that I work with that had no idea of the history. You know, these things wasn't taught in school, so the

history was very vague to them, and for them to understand of where we were coming from and how much trauma and hurt that we carried with us throughout generations and generations, and that how it's trickling down into the next generation that we're dealing with now and how we are supporting them.

But I think having some mandatory training for each organization or institution that is working with First Nations, Inuit, or Indigenous people is really ideal. It's really ideal for people to understand that what we've been through in history, you know, the trauma, you know, the work that's happening in First Nations community, and you know, the mental health services that we do need aren't culturally specific, you know? They're not culturally aware of things that we have been through within communities and how we are told that we are resilient people and this is why we are here, the emotional labour which was mentioned before, which in institutions is very, very hard to deal with as an Indigenous woman. We are considered the token Indian when we are in a meeting where I'm asked to smudge, you know?

A friend of mine who is an African Nova Scotian of descent was really offended by that, like, asking how come she wasn't asked to do the smudge. She has a smudge bowl, she has a feather, you know, she could open any meeting, but was always turned to me.

So I felt that I wasn't the token Indian for our organization, but for them to recognize what they were doing. They had created a racial justice group within our organization where we had a chance to kind of debrief things that were happening within the organization that we felt, you know, was directed towards the BIPOC-population which is Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

We just felt that we were just targeted all around, People that realizing that the standard of service that they were providing for Indigenous people wasn't up to par and it wasn't things that we felt that we were getting handed, that, you know, people weren't culturally aware of what was happening, but they weren't aware of what they were -- how they were impacting that as well in a negative way.

It was really hard for to build these relationships and within these communities. We were -- the external and the internal supports, they need to understand how to approach and how to support Indigenous people that are working with mental health issues. It is pretty prominent here in our community, and we have a very, very tight-knit community who have seen a lot of loss in the last two years. We're dealing with a tremendous amount of grief within our community, and just finding ways to kind of heal and move forward is probably our next step now. And I think that would work great here as well.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Karla.

Tuma?

MR. TUMA YOUNG: Okay. Wela'lin. I'm just going to keep my remarks brief as we're at the end here.

I guess in some ways what the Mass Casualty Commission needs to think about is that you're being called upon to develop a new relationship, maybe not a new relationship, but a -- you know, to help in the renewal of the relationships between the communities and institutions of justice and law, and in particular, you know, the policing, I guess.

Now, because what happened, we are all changed, you know? Whether for the good or for the bad or just in another direction, every single one of us was changed in one form or fashion, you know?

You're asked to come forward and think about the way forward for all of us, you know, for Nova Scotia, and really, you're being -- the Commissioners are asked to help us as citizenry to make -- how do we make Nova Scotia a better place in spite of what happened, in regards to what happened?

And there is one thing too, so when you -- you'll have to look at the relationship between law and community. What is the purpose of the law? What is the purpose of the justice? What are the purposes of these institutions?

And they may need to change. Change is not a bad thing. It's

always good, you know? I often tell people -- people say, you know, "How do we incorporate Indigenous law or L'nus law into the work that you're going to be doing, into these changes?"

And they say, "Well, I can't go back, and no, I can't believe what -- what was the law that was like, 1,000 years ago."

And I said, "Well, the law, a new law can change and adapt and become modernized, and you know, it can play by the contemporary rules. Every single law does, you know?" You have to realize statutes of Nova Scotia being revised. What was the law 50 years ago has changed, even among their own institutes.

You know, I think about the law before 1985, and then it was changing Bill C-31, and subsequently changed again. And it may change again, you know?

So law is not necessarily a static thing, or even our justice institutes. That's -- you know, there's a difference in some force.

So we're looking for a renewed relationship with each other. And in this process, I'm also going to offer a bit of -- I hope it's wise counsel, maybe it's not -- to the Commissioners. As you go through this process, you will be changed. It is like the journey of the Mi'kmaq people when the scouts go off on a journey, and they become the scouts, they go into the deep, deep woods where there are many dangers and many pitfalls and many challenges. And then they come back and they tell the communities what's up ahead. So they are changed.

In our past experiences with other Commissions that deal with trauma and so, the Commissionaires or the people who have been sitting here listening, have been changed.

You know, I think about the TRC folks. Justice Murray Sinclair, his health suffered as a result of this, you know? That was the price he paid, and many of the researchers also, they forever were changed as a result of listening. You cannot listen to all of this and not be affected.

So I certainly hope that all of you have some sort of a support mechanism that you can go to and rely on and then -- or debrief, whatever it is that you need to do, because at the end of the day, going through this journey will change you and it will change all of us. (Native word).

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you, Tuma.

I'm going to turn it over to the Commissioners for some last words and then we'll end with Elder Companion closing the circle.

COMMISSIONER FITCH: Thank you. And with those caring words to my -- it's hard not to be emotional closing out today.

I just want to thank each and every one of you, and the -- all of the points that you've touched on are common threads that we've heard through our work over the last almost two years now, you know, the social issues, the mental health issues, the physical health issues, education, police training, community policing, all of these things continue to surface, and I think, Tuma, you had mentioned earlier -- I've had the honour of holding Elder Companion's eagle feather more than anybody because of the pause and the circle going virtual. And when you talked about the feather representing the transformation of the young eagle and we've commented during our work and I've heard this from those who have been working with us, that this isn't about just police reform, this isn't just a policing matter, this really is an opportunity for transformational change.

Philippa, you talked about community policing, and we've heard about community, and community is unique. Each and every community is unique. There isn't an A to Z program that’s called Community Policing. And to do it right you have to invest in relationships and build trust and continue to transform together, not apart.

So those are my closing remarks. You've given us certainly speaking for myself, a tremendous amount to absorb and to take into consideration. And I can’t thank you enough for the kindness of your time.

COMMISSIONER MacDONALD: It's with great humility and profound appreciation and I thank you so much for your amazing courage and more what you're doing day in day out and how you are adding trauma to trauma by the work you're doing, and I'm sure this afternoon was no different. So it's with profound appreciation for that.

Thank you, Sharon, for reminding us to bring the humanity back to our institutions.

And Tuma, thank you for your encouragement. I greatly appreciate it.

And thank all of you for your amazing contributions. I rally very much humbly appreciate them.

COMMISSIONER STANTON: We came to the Commission -- certainly, I came to it acutely aware of the weight of the recommendations that have been made in the past.

The inquiries, in particular the commissions that have focused on the rights of Indigenous people have piled up recommendations for decades. And one of the things that we did early on in the Commission was task Dr. Cunliffe and her team with looking at the past recommendations of the past reports that relate to policing, that relate to emergency alerting, that relate to public communications, that relate to gender-based violence, that relate to the other aspects of the mandate. And consider -- so that we could see a path to look at what new recommendations does this Commission need to make. But also, what recommendations have been made time and time again so that we can dig into what are the barriers to those being implemented? Why are they not implemented? To try to provide some path forward on that for the institutions that will be tasked with implementing the recommendations that we make, because it is a very frustrating thing for all of the people who work as hard as all of you do to try to lift up your communities and to try to make change, to try to keep one another safe when you don't feel heard and when you don't feel as though people are picking up the mantle

that's been put down for them.

So we have listened with humility and with great respect to all of you today, which is what you deserve. And we hope that you feel heard. And what we hope is that when we provide our report and our recommendations to the folks that are tasked with making our community safer, that they will hear the great need and see how to get it done in the ways that need to be done.

It might be a vain hope because we know that this is not the first time around the block for any of the folks around the room. And we've all seen the reports pile up.

I would just say though that over time the recommendations that are made -- it's never enough. But each time there's a set of them, there's someone like the young Juliana who thinks, well -- who has some hope and has some optimism and does try and make some of the changes. And I think we have to keep trying and we'll do our best to make a plan in our report for the implementation of the recommendations to give a roadmap to people to see in institutions what part is theirs to do, and how they might go about doing it.

It won't all get done; we all know that. But we'll do our best to try to provide that pathway and then we will ask people to try to take up that mantle and do what they can, which part of it is theirs.

But it is what you said, Sharon. It's about taking responsibility yourself and for the person in front of you. And we can only encourage people to do that and try to create the conditions for people to do that. But one of the things that we have tried to do is have people understand that regardless of where we're coming from in all of this, we do share that desire for safer communities for all of us to live in, and we hope that with that common ground we can move things further towards that goal.

But I don't think any of us are under any illusion about how big a mountain it is to climb. But as Justice Sinclair said in so many words, "We can show you the pathway at least and you've helped us with putting the other piece of that

pathway in."

So thank you all very much for your time and your generosity and your extraordinary courage and resilience and efforts in your communities.

Thank you.

MS. CHERYL COPAGE-GEHUE: Thank you.

And to the Elder to close us out.

(CLOSING PRAYER BY ELDER MARLENE COMPANION)

--- Upon adjourning at 5:01 p.m.

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Wendy Clements, a certified court reporter, hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate transcription of my notes/records to the best of my skill and ability, and I so swear.

Je, Wendy Clements, une sténographe officiel, certifie que les pages ci-hautes sont une transcription conforme de mes notes/enregistrements au meilleur de mes capacités, et je le jure.

Wendy Clements