

Law Amendment Appearance
HRM Board of Police Commissioners Chair Mr Russell Walker
Bill No. 72 – A Bill to Establish Serious Incident Response Team
Dennis Building-November 23, 2010-1600 hrs
Speaking Notes

Good afternoon, my name is Russell Walker and I am the Chair of the HRM Board of Police Commissioners.

I am also pleased to appear before you today to express my support for this legislation. As the Civilian Oversight Body for policing in HRM we understand how important public confidence is to effective law enforcement. A lack of confidence in one aspect impacts the community's overall confidence in policing. No matter how well police investigate serious incidents involving themselves, there will be concerns in the public regarding the independence of that investigation. It is unfair to ask our police to investigate themselves.

Chief Beazley has discussed the operational aspects of Bill 72 so I will limit my comments to how Bill 72 could impact HRM and other municipalities; in particular, how the Serious Incident Response Team will be funded.

Much of the investigative resources of the Serious Incident Response Team will come from officers seconded from police agencies either on a part-time or full-time basis. It would appear that Halifax Regional Police will be required to do both. Bill 72 makes it clear in subsection 26F(3) that any officer assigned to the Serious Incident Response Team remains the financial responsibility of agency from which he is selected. In other words, the municipalities will bear the cost of their officers assigned to the unit. This would appear to include not only salary and benefits, but also travel expenses and overtime associated to an investigation.

Bill 72 could result in officers being away from their duties in their own municipalities for extended period of times without any means for the municipality to backfill their position. It must be acknowledged that municipalities will bear much of the cost of the new unit. In addition to the regular salaries and benefits and the training of the officers involved, municipalities will be expected to supply many of the other specialized services required. It puts an unreasonable burden on municipalities to be expected to pay the costs of officers while away and then pick up the additional cost of backfilling their duties at home. The cost of the investigation should be borne by the Serious Incident Response Team, including the cost of using seconded police officers.

Everyone agrees that establishment of the Serious Incident Response Team is the right thing to do and is consistent with the Minister of Justice's responsibility to maintain public confidence in policing in Nova Scotia. That responsibility includes ensuring that the Serious Incident Response Team is sufficiently funded to carry out its mandate.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these concerns.