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Greater transparency and consultation needed as government pursues creation of provincial police service

EDMONTON - The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) believes that the Government of Alberta has decided to create a provincial police service despite promising Albertans a referendum on the idea.

Justice Minister Kaycee Madu began a series of seven town hall meetings on July 20 to hear Albertans' concerns about crime prevention in their communities. AUMA, representing more than 260 communities of all sizes across the province, reviewed his presentation and determined that these town hall meetings have little to do with crime prevention. Instead, they appear to be selling the idea of creating a provincial police force.

The AUMA finds this development deeply troubling given that the government's feasibility study has not been made available to the public.

Until last week, we were patiently waiting for the provincial government to publicly release a \$2 million PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) feasibility report it commissioned in October 2020. The report was presented to the Government of Alberta on April 30, 2021. In mid-June, Minister Madu hinted the report would be released when "it's time to release the report." In mid-July, Premier Jason Kenney said the report would be "released at the appropriate time."

"Albertans have waited long enough to see what this feasibility report has to say," said AUMA President Barry Morishita. "We call on the Government of Alberta to do the right thing and publicly release it as soon as possible."

The UCP government did not campaign on the issue of a provincial police service during the 2019 election. In November 2019, Premier Kenney assured Albertans that his government would not decide to establish an Alberta pension plan or provincial police service unless a majority of Albertans endorsed those proposals in a fair and democratic referendum. We expect him to honour this commitment with a provincial referendum or by including it as part of a provincial election platform.

Alberta would forfeit federal government funding of about \$160 million a year that is provided for police services through a contract with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) if a provincial police service were formed.

While policing is particularly challenging in rural Alberta, where the distances between RCMP detachments are great and police officers are in limited supply, all Albertans would be called upon to pay for a provincial police service. This means increased costs for those who live in rural areas, municipalities currently relying on the RCMP, and those who live in communities where residents fund a municipal police force.

"When it comes to how our hard-earned tax dollars are spent on policing, Albertans deserve a fair deal from their provincial government," said Morishita. "If all Albertans must pay for something, then all Albertans must have a say in the decision."

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