

Oak Bay Police Board
1703 Monterey Avenue
Oak Bay, BC V8R 5V6



May 4, 2023

Board of Education for School District 61 (Greater Victoria)
556 Boleskine Road
Victoria, BC V8Z 1E8

Re: Submission for School Police Liaison Officer (SPLO) Review

Dear Chair Duncan and SD61 Board,

We appreciate Chair Duncan and Ms. Carmichael taking time to meet with our Police Board members on March 24 and the invitation to make a submission to the Board of Education for School District 61 (the “Board”) regarding the current School Police Liaison Officer (SPLO) review process. Please accept this letter as our submission to the Board; we would also welcome the opportunity to make a brief presentation to the Board when the item is on your agenda.

We make three main points in our submission: (1) the Oak Bay Police Board is committed to working with the School Board to ensure the SPLO program is safe and inclusive of all members of our community; (2) the Greater Victoria Teachers’ Association’s (GVTA) March 3, 2023 letter does not reflect the role of SPLOs in Victoria schools and does not consider the fact that students are also members of the broader community in which community policing is grounded; and (3) the research underlying the recommendation of the Human Rights Commissioner highlights the need for further research but does not support immediately ending the SPLO program.

1. The role of police boards & our commitment to collaboration

Police boards are independent of municipal and provincial governments, and distinct from police departments. Police boards are mandated by the *Police Act* to provide civilian oversight of the police department including by establishing policies and setting the strategic direction for the department; providing financial oversight of the

department; dealing with policy and service complaints; and handling labour relations.

As such, we believe police boards can make a significant contribution to ensuring the SPLO program is safe and inclusive of all members of the school community. We take seriously the concerns raised by the Human Rights Commissioner regarding the impact of SPLOs on Indigenous, Black and other marginalized students. We share the goal of creating safe and inclusive schools that uphold human rights and we see a path for collaboration between the Oak Bay Police Board and the School Board to achieve that.

2. The role of SPLOs & the community policing model

The Oak Bay Police Department is a community-based policing organization: it advocates community partnerships with a multi-agency approach and collaboration as a means of achieving public safety and preventing and resolving problems. Members of the Oak Bay Police department primarily provide community policing, with external investigative and speciality services provided through memorandums of understanding with other police departments. As part of its community policing mandate, the Department responds to a wide range of calls of a general assistance nature, youth concerns, public education, substance abuse, and issues regarding mental health. The Department is committed to partnerships with the community, leading to the sharing in the delivery of police services.

The SPLO program plays a vital role in community policing: Oak Bay believes police must be approachable to be trusted. The feedback we have received on our SPLO program from a variety of stakeholders (including students, parents, teachers and school administrators) has been consistently positive and we have seen the benefits for students firsthand: Students who have built a positive relationship with members of our Department through the SPLO program are more likely to seek help if they are victimized or witness criminal activity, and experience less trauma when involved in events necessitating a police response. The role played by Oak Bay's SPLO in the response to a threat of gun violence at Oak Bay High School in November 2022 is a poignant example. Feedback received through Oak Bay's SPLO program also benefits our policing practices, including trauma-informed changes to school lockdown procedures.

We are concerned that several of the GVTA's recommendations would remove SPLOs from roles that cannot effectively be performed by others in the community (e.g., programming to make students less vulnerable to crime), or where SPLOs are essential members of community-based teams. Immediately ending the SPLO

program without alternative providers of these services in place could cause significant harm to students.

Moreover, several of the GVTA's recommendations appear to misconceive the role of SPLOs in Victoria schools. SPLOs work as part of a team with teachers and school administration; they do not independently participate in "student behaviour management", "surveillance of students" or "well-being checks on students attending or not attending school". Further, several of the GVTA's recommendations would work counter to the principles of community policing. Barring police officers from attending school functions or providing mentorship removes crucial opportunities for building positive relationships that support trust and collaboration. Eroding trust and collaboration in policing does not make schools or students safer; students are also members of the broader community. Regardless of whether they encounter police in schools, students are likely to encounter law enforcement at some point—whether as a witness to, or victim of, a crime, or otherwise—and should have the benefit of a police department that they know and that works collaboratively with community partners.

At the same time, we agree with the GVTA's call for school programming to be delivered from a trauma-informed, compassionate perspective that addresses structural inequalities and power dynamics, as well as impacts on BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities. There is no reason SPLO programs cannot be delivered in this manner, and no question that they should be. The Oak Bay Police Board is committed to working with the School Board to ensure this.

3. The need for further research & assessment

We have reviewed the Samuels-Wortley report commissioned by the BC Human Rights Commissioner. The report provides a literature review of studies pertaining to SPLO programs in Canada and the United States. Due to the lack of "peer-reviewed studies that explore the impacts of Canadian SLO programs on marginalized students", the report draws heavily on US-based research. However, US-based research focused on the "school-to-prison pipeline" cannot be generalized to Canada due to drastically differing (or in some instances, absent) school management policies. The Toronto Police internal evaluation reviewed in the Samuels-Wortley report is also not generalizable to Greater Victoria as it assessed a targeted SPLO program introduced after the fatal shooting of a student at a Toronto high school over a decade ago, rather than as a key component of a contemporary community-policing framework. We note that one of the Canadian studies cited by Samuels-Wortley suggested positive outcomes when SPLOs are

introduced as a component of a community policing model (Broll and Howells, 2019).

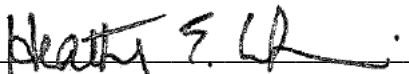
We agree there is an immediate need for assessment and research conducted in BC that centres the experience of marginalized students and employs high-quality evaluation strategies. The Oak Bay Police Board would be pleased to collaborate with the Board of Education in that work. Greater Victoria Students deserve nothing less.

Thank you for considering our submission. We welcome the opportunity to make a presentation to the Board and discuss the matter further.

Yours sincerely,



Mayor Kevin Murdoch, Board Chair



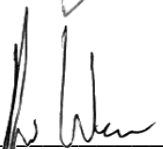
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