



**Municipal Affairs and Housing
Office of the Minister**

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November 16, 2023

Andrew Wilson, Clerk
Standing Committee on National Defense
Via Email: NDDN@parl.gc.ca

Dear Andrew Wilson:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee's work on procurement for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), specifically to the deployment of the CAF for emergency responses in provinces and territories.

Prior to commenting specifically on CAF domestic deployments, I would like to provide a brief overview of Nova Scotia's emergency management structure. The current model for emergency management in Nova Scotia is aligned with other provinces in Canada and jurisdictions across North America generally. We begin by emphasizing the need for individual Nova Scotians to consider their own personal preparedness for emergencies. This primarily consists of having a 72 hour plan that accounts for their own unique circumstances, including having nonperishable food and clean water, required medications, some cash in case electronic payments are unavailable, etc.

Beyond that, the provincial *Emergency Management Act* in Nova Scotia requires that each municipality has an emergency management plan, by-law, and emergency management committee. They must designate an emergency management coordinator to manage their program. This municipal role is key in the initial response to the emergencies which we have recently seen across our country.

Next, the provincial Emergency Management Office (NSEMO) plays a coordinating role in the provision of emergency training and exercising with municipal, provincial and critical infrastructure partners and in the planning and response to actual events. Finally, in cases of extreme events the provincial NSEMO can reach out for support from the federal government via the request for assistance process from the provincial Minister responsible for emergency management to their federal counterpart.

In most cases federal support has come in the form of the CAF. I want to recognize that, as has been publicly reported, the CAF is facing significant recruitment and retention issues combined with an unpredictable geopolitical landscape. Despite these challenges, public expectations are very high that military resources will be deployed early into an emergency response.

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When we look at how emergencies are supported federally in the United States, a gap in our own national readiness for natural disasters becomes evident. American states have access to a core of personnel trained in emergency management through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). No such dedicated federal emergency management capacity exists in Canada, which has led to an overreliance on the Canadian Armed Forces.

Climate change has increased the risk of more frequent and severe natural disasters such as wildfires and extreme weather. Canadians can expect future emergency responses that quickly go beyond the resources and capacity of provinces and territories to respond. Yet, Canada currently has no national emergency management standards, nor a comprehensive national program to promote a base level of training and skills to build capacity at the provincial and territorial level as is championed by FEMA in the United States.

This intentional emergency management system has expanded the ability of states to support one another during significant emergencies. It supports interoperability, because each jurisdiction speaks the same language and uses the same approach. Deploying personnel to support large-scale events also increases the experience and skillsets of emergency management staff, further professionalizing the field.

Now is the time for the Government of Canada to engage in discussions with its provincial and territorial partners regarding consideration of creating a dedicated federal emergency management agency in Canada like the FEMA model in the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this process, and I am happy to further discuss these comments at any time.

Sincerely,



Honourable John A. Lohr
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing