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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 42 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We will start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, June 23, 2022, the committee is resuming consideration of Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms).

Today we have two panels of witnesses. For the first hour, we have witnesses by video conference.

[Translation]

We will first welcome Pierre Brochet, president of the Association des directeurs de police du Québec.

We will also hear from Evan Bray, co-chair of the special purpose committee on firearms of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

Lastly, we will hear Brian Sauvé, president of the National Police Federation.

[English]

We will give each group up to five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): I raise a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Before proceeding with the witnesses' presentations, can you confirm that the sound checks have been done for all witnesses? I see that today's witnesses are appearing by videoconference, and I want to make sure that the interpreters have confirmed that the sound is adequate.

[English]

The Chair: Absolutely, and thank you for that. That's a very good point.

The clerk has assured me that the sound checks have been done and everyone has proper equipment.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will begin with Mr. Brochet of the Association des directeurs de police du Québec.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Brochet (President, Association des directeurs de police du Québec): Good morning, everyone.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting the Association des directeurs de police du Québec to take part in this discussion.

The Association des directeurs de police du Québec groups together 34 police services working in Quebec. They include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal and the Sûreté du Québec, as well as all of the other municipal police services.

Before discussing Bill C-21, I would like to say that Quebec's police chiefs are extremely aware of the fact that gun violence claims victims and affects their friends and family.

We are in favour of strengthening gun control. I think that it is the right message to send Canadians. As a society, Canada sends a strong message concerning our desire to reduce the number of firearms in circulation. In particular, we wish to reduce domestic violence and mass shootings.

We are also in favour of the buyback of assault weapons, an important measure that will certainly have a positive impact. Obviously, we need to put the logistics in place and coordinate efforts with the various provincial governments. This strategy will be costly, so the federal and provincial governments need to discuss the issue thoroughly.

We are also in favour of the handgun freeze. This is an important step forward. This being said, like you, we are aware that we will have to wait a few generations before we see any real change, because the people who currently own handguns will be able to keep them. However, we think that this is a step in the right direction.

I am sure that everyone has heard about the urban violence in the Montreal area, in particular in Montreal and Laval. To reduce urban violence, we need to continue our efforts to address arms trafficking and border controls. In Quebec, most firearms seized from criminals are smuggled in from the United States.

We would also like to request that the law be modernized to include ghost guns. As you may know, ghost guns are becoming increasingly popular. People order firearm components and assemble them to produce what we call ghost guns. We need to think about the possibility of making certain firearm components illegal.

We are also in favour of a red flag law when there is a restraining order in place. This would allow law enforcement to seize the firearms of a person who is subject to a restraining order. This would obviously have a serious impact, including in the case of domestic violence.

We are also in favour of stiffer penalties. According to the association, the fact that the maximum penalty is now 14 years is very good news. However, we would like to point out that this bill needs to be consistent with Bill C-5 to remove mandatory prison sentences for several firearm-related crimes.

The addition of two provisions allowing Canadian police services to use electronic surveillance in cases of unauthorized possession of a firearm and possession of a prohibited firearm is also good news.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brochet.

I will now turn the floor over to the representative of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police for five minutes.

[*English*]

Chief Evan Bray (Co-Chair, Special Purpose Committee on Firearms, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police): Thank you very much. I very much appreciate this opportunity. Good morning to you all.

I'm speaking to you this morning on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. My name is Evan Bray. I'm the chief of police in Regina, Saskatchewan, and am the co-chair of the special purpose committee on firearms for the CACP. The CACP represents chiefs of police and executive police leadership from across Canada.

The CACP believes that the proposed legislation recognizes that stopping gun violence requires a whole-of-society approach, including education and prevention, to address root causes, as well as law enforcement to help stop the criminal elements that are perpetrating violence in our communities. We believe Bill C-21 will help prevent victimization by way of a firearm and will improve public safety.

I just want to drill down on a couple of areas.

First of all, on handguns, the CACP supports a national versus municipal patchwork approach to managing the issue of handguns in Canada. We believe that a handgun freeze is one method of reducing access to these types of firearms, while allowing existing law-abiding handgun owners to practise their sport.

However, we continue to maintain that restricting lawful handgun ownership will not meaningfully address the real issue, which is illegal firearms and illegal handguns obtained from the United States that have led to the disturbing current trend in gun violence

that is largely related to gangs, street gangs and more sophisticated organized crime groups.

With regard to firearms smuggling and trafficking, we support the implementation of new firearms-related offences, intensified border controls and strengthened penalties to help deter criminal activities and to combat firearms smuggling and trafficking, thereby reducing the risk that illegal firearms find their way into Canadian communities and are used to commit criminal offences. The CACP welcomes changes that provide new police authorizations and tools to access information about licence-holders in the investigation of individuals who are suspected of conducting criminal activities, such as straw purchasing and weapons trafficking.

With regard to replica firearms, the CACP agrees with implementing initiatives that target the criminal use and diversion of firearms to the illicit market by prohibiting the importation, exportation and sale of replica firearms, specifically those that have a likeness to real firearms and are indistinguishable from the genuine articles from near or far, or that can be altered to convert them into deadly weapons. This is something the CACP urged the government to do in a resolution passed by our membership way back in 2000—22 years ago.

Replicas are encountered in the hands of criminals for street-level extortion, robbery, for personal protection from other criminals and to intimidate or terrorize victims when committing an offence. As a result, there's been a regrettable need for police officers to resort to the use of deadly force in situations where they believe replica firearms to be real. Contributing to police concerns for public safety is also the fact that imitation firearms are largely unregulated and users can acquire them very easily without proof of age, licence or competency.

The CACP is not opposed to recreational activities involving the use of airsoft guns. However, those who use these replicas for recreational purposes and who emphasize the importance of the likeness to real guns and the importance of long-range shooting capacities of over 500 feet per second to enhance the overall gaming experience have likely never found themselves in a real-life situation facing an individual engaged in criminal activity who's armed with one of these guns.

Reducing firearm-related deaths in the cases of family violence and self-harm is an easy one for the CACP to support. The red flag law, the yellow flag law and the requirement to surrender firearms during a legal challenge of licence revocation are impactful ways to help reduce gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and self-harm by limiting access to firearms for those who pose a risk of harm to themselves or to others.

Regarding the mandatory buyback program—and of course there's been a lot of talk about this—and the requirement to make assault-style weapons permanently inoperable, the CACP is still awaiting details on the implementation of such a program and the implications for and expectations of police services in Canada. Having said that, the CACP recognizes and understands concerns that have been expressed by certain provinces in the country about using Canadian police resources to confiscate legally acquired firearms from Canadians.

Ultimately, this early part of the buyback program is essentially an administrative process; it's not a policing issue. As a result, such a program could be managed by entities other than police services, thereby allowing police resources to be focused on those who refuse to follow the new law and, more importantly, on addressing border integrity, smuggling and trafficking.

• (1110)

In conclusion, the CACP supports improving safety for the public and for frontline police officers. Reasonable requirements on responsible firearms owners need to be balanced with protective measures to help mitigate the impact of the worst outcomes of firearms. While we agree with the proposed changes of Bill C-21 in principle, we must now focus on what they mean in practice and clarify the role police services are expected to play in enforcing these regulations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

[*Translation*]

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Sauvé of the National Police Federation for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Sauvé (President, National Police Federation): Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to appear today.

My name is Brian Sauvé and I'm the president of the National Police Federation, the certified bargaining agent representing close to 20,000 members of the RCMP across Canada.

Firearms violence is a complex issue that requires a holistic government approach, including improvements to community and social programs, criminal justice system investments and increased health care and policy resources. The NPF has made 11 recommendations in our submissions to the committee, and I will highlight some of them in my remarks today.

First, the legislation primarily targets legal firearm owners who have followed the regulations as opposed to addressing the root causes of firearms violence. The Government of Canada is encouraged to widen its focus, as Bill C-21 narrowly focuses on the tool—the firearm—and not the criminal activity surrounding it. By only addressing the tool, you're failing to address the root problem, and the criminal perpetrator will continue to offend and victimize with different tools or with complete disregard for the legislation, as criminals do obtain firearms illegally today.

Between 2016 and 2021, the violent crime index across provinces rose 30% and the crime severity index rose 10%. Juris-

dictions with the highest rates of firearm-related violent crime also have relatively high rates of crime in general. Reducing firearm violence is a key issue and should remain a priority for the government. Canada already has a strict licensing regime for firearms purchases, and the changes proposed do not address issues of organized crime or gang violence, illegal weapon smuggling, systemic causes of crime and emerging threats such as 3-D-printed ghost guns.

In addition, police services need to be properly resourced. Without the adequate resources, increased police mandates apply additional pressures to uphold and maintain public safety. The government needs to recognize the importance of providing additional support to police officers to ensure that they can focus on public safety and crime prevention. This legislation must be accompanied by additional resources for RCMP members and police services across Canada.

Second, the government should develop uniform standards for tracing firearms involved in the commission of a crime, ensuring that police services are adequately resourced to enhance tracing capabilities. Currently, not all firearms recovered as part of a police investigation are sent for tracing. In 2020, only 39% of firearms used in firearm-related homicides were recovered, and of those, only 69% were sent for tracing.

Third, we need to stop the illegal flow of firearms into Canada. While the RCMP and CBSA are intercepting many illegal firearms at the border, gun crimes are still becoming more prevalent. Without adequate resourcing, firearms will continue to make their way into Canada. Partnerships across jurisdictions with judges, prosecutors and government officials, in collaboration with law enforcement, are necessary to facilitate information sharing and for discovering illegal firearm trafficking patterns and crime syndicates. The RCMP's border integrity program must be enhanced to enable proactive RCMP investigative weapons enforcement activity and the dismantling of gangs and organized crime involved in smuggling firearms.

Lastly, Bill C-21 fails to address the increasing concern over the involvement of younger persons in shootings and gun violence. In Toronto in 2021, the average age of persons involved in shootings, as an accused, a suspect or a person of interest, dropped from 25 to 20 years of age. It is estimated that there are over 400 street gangs operating in Canada, and a whole-of-government approach is required to address gun and gang activity. Investments in diverting youth from joining these gangs must be an essential part of the plan.

Law enforcement agencies, governments, schools, social services, neighbourhood leaders and community organizations need to work together to identify and implement effective tools and programs focused on youth at risk of gun violence. Bill C-21 should focus on tackling systemic issues that allow gun and gang violence to take place. We have an opportunity here to create a unique system to deal with this issue by strengthening border controls and imposing stronger penalties to combat firearm smuggling and trafficking, thereby reducing the presence of illegal firearms in Canadian communities and how frequently they're used to commit criminal offences.

• (1115)

Thank you. I'll take any questions.

The Chair: Thank you to all.

We'll start our questions now with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm going to start off with the National Police Federation.

We heard from CACP earlier in the meeting that implementing all of these new regulations about guns is mostly going to be an administrative thing, not a policing thing. However, we know that the RCMP and many police forces across the country are dealing with massive issues with staffing challenges.

Can you comment on how the added regulatory burden of this new government legislation could impact the police's ability to carry out their mandate to keep the public safe?

Mr. Brian Sauv  : I can. I will start by sitting back and saying that every police officer across Canada, especially the membership of the RCMP, is fairly non-partisan. They will uphold and enforce the laws that are enacted by the legislature and interpreted by the Supreme Court of Canada. In this case, regardless of how Bill C-21, a buyback program or whatever else gets implemented, when called to do their duty of going to pick up from firearms owners firearms that may be considered to be not in compliance with the law, they will do that.

However, it just adds more duties to their already expanding mandate, so at what cost does that come to the Canadian public? It creates larger screens on the dispatch screen. It creates more files for the members to go to. Are we looking at longer wait times for other police presence—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you. I'm wondering whether resources will be diverted from dealing with illegal gun crime to dealing with legal gun owners who will have their firearms taken away.

Mr. Brian Sauv  : I would suspect they will. You are adding a job to police officers across Canada.

• (1120)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: At our last meeting, we heard from the Alberta Mounted Shooters Association, who said that their sport, which uses primarily single-action revolvers, will be destroyed because of this handgun freeze.

In your experience, are single-action or even double-action revolvers a weapon or firearm of choice by criminals?

Mr. Brian Sauv  : I'm not a gun guy. You would have to speak to an expert on that who analyzes gun crime in Canada. It's not really for me to answer.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay.

To the CACP, then, are single-action revolvers the handguns you're primarily worried about that criminals are using?

Chief Evan Bray: I would say not primarily. The reality is that criminals who are going to use a firearm in the commission of an offence are going to grab and use anything they can. That is why even replica firearms can be a challenge in the commission of an offence. If you're looking at the type of handguns that are being used, I would say it's predominantly more mainstream handguns.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: So it's not your revolvers.

Under this handgun freeze, as I've been made aware by some stakeholders, the reproduction of firearms that were designed before 1898, including the flintlock pistol, which I'm sure the witnesses can see here.... A muzzle-loaded flintlock pistol using black powder could also be banned under Bill C-21.

Is it your experience as law enforcement professionals that these are being used on the streets?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I want to confirm—and this is just for my own personal knowledge—that we are allowed to use props in committee.

A voice: It's not a prop.

The Chair: I don't think there's a rule on that. We can't use props in the House, but we often have witnesses distribute samples of various things and so forth. I think it's in order.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question to law enforcement is this: Is it your experience that these firearms are being used on the streets in the commission of crimes?

Chief Evan Bray: I would say it is rare.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Are there any cases that you can think of?

Chief Evan Bray: There are none that I can think of off the top of my head, but that doesn't mean it hasn't happened. Again, I think criminals will use anything in the commission of an offence that would replicate.... I think about robberies that happen sometimes with simply a barrel of a gun, not a complete firearm, maybe wrapped in a blanket so that the store owner doesn't know what they're facing.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: When you're taking into account risk here, you would say that the kind of firearm I just showed you is of very low to almost no risk.

Chief Evan Bray: I don't think I would say that. I mean—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Is it low risk?

Chief Evan Bray: What I'm saying is that any firearm presented to someone, if it's used for a robbery, intimidation or threatening, presents a risk to that person.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's interesting.

Chief Evan Bray: It may not mean they're going to use it to shoot that person, but we have retaliation crime happening all the time where a replica firearm is used in the initial instance and then the follow-up was a real firearm. I think it does pose a form of risk.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's interesting. Thank you.

I'll go back to the National Police Federation.

We heard recently that your members need to practise at private ranges in order to maintain proficiency. We also heard that handgun owners' mandatory membership dues are critical to the financial sustainability of these ranges and that they will close if Bill C-21 should pass.

How will the shutting down of these private ranges impact your members' ability to train?

Mr. Brian Sauv : It's going to place a greater responsibility on the RCMP to expand their training capacity, and ultimately that's going to put us in the position of asking the RCMP to have government-approved or RCMP-approved training facilities across Canada. There is that component to it versus being able to use the local shooting range.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: This is my final line of questioning.

We've had a number of witnesses on this debate from across the political spectrum who have drawn a lot of concerns about the so-called red flag laws in this legislation. We had a chief of police who suggested that if people go to the court system instead of calling 911, they could be putting themselves in more danger.

Do you think these red flag laws are necessary? Aren't police already responding to victims' calls when firearms are present?

Mr. Brian Sauv : Yes, police are responding, and they do take firearm calls very seriously. However, from our membership's perspective, anything that can be done to improve the safety of victims of crime is a good thing.

Now, is using a red flag, yellow flag and green flag the right system? I don't know, but I think it's a great initiative and a great start.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We'll now go to Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for appearing and, indeed, for all you do in helping to keep Canadians safe.

I'd like to start my questions with Mr. Bray.

Chief Bray, when you were talking, you mentioned concerns related to ghost guns and components. One of the opportunities I think we have in this legislation is to think about how we address component parts, whether they are slide assemblies, trigger assemblies or barrels, and regulate them to make sure that people can't make their own weapons at home. After hearing from the Vancouver Police Department and others, I know this is a major concern. Certainly in my community in the Lower Mainland it is, and I guess it is across the country.

What are your views on what we should be doing to address this in Bill C-21? Do you think we should be spending a bit of time and effort on ensuring that the issue of ghost guns and components, particularly the regulation of components and their importation, is included? What are your views on that?

Chief Evan Bray: I think that is an important part of this discussion. Ultimately, we, too, in the Prairies deal with the 3-D printing and manufacturing of firearms. The reality is that people can print the predominate pieces of the firearm. They can order parts of a firearm online, which by themselves as just a part—whether it's a trigger or a different component of the firearm—are not illegal to purchase, and they don't really signal any sort of warning sign if someone brings in those types of things through the mail or through other forms.

The ability to put together a firearm like that is something we're seeing more and more. We've done a couple of fairly large projects here in Saskatchewan, and we've been able to take those types of firearms off the streets. I think they're becoming more and more of an issue, and I absolutely think there is room for us to do some sort of legislative work to restrict the ability for this happen or to regulate the ability where it can.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: What type of restrictions or regulation would make life easier for police who are dealing with this every single day and who are seeing more and more of these ghost guns in the commission of crimes?

Chief Evan Bray: I think there's probably a lot, and that would likely need a bit of exploration to understand. I think right now if I order a firing pin out of Germany, there's no tracking of it. There are no requirements for that to be regulated in any way, whereas if I go to buy a firearm, ammunition or something else, in most cases there's a need to produce some sort of licence that shows I can do that.

We had a recent case in Saskatchewan where a person was fairly sophisticated in their ability to produce not only a firearm predominantly made from a 3-D printer, but one that would fire 40 or 50 times while it held the integrity of the firearm. You need it to be able to fire only once for it to be fatal and used in a homicide.

I think if we can somehow work on the importation of parts, and perhaps there are some other things.... I don't know what best practices exist in other countries, but again, it would be an exploratory piece of work to look into that.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Just to confirm, if we were to find ways to include the possession, sale and importation of the types of parts used to manufacture ghost guns, you would be supportive.

Chief Evan Bray: I would be very supportive.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's fantastic.

I want to turn now, with the limited time I have, to something you mentioned earlier, which was this whole question of replica firearms, like airsoft guns, that are made to look like real weapons.

One of the questions that I and others on this committee asked industry was to think about ways to make sure their weapons or toy guns—whatever you want to call them—don't get people shot and don't make law enforcement have to react as though they are live-round weapons that can kill people.

How important is it for you in policing to make sure that toys that look like real guns are off the streets? What would you say to the industry when they are manufacturing these types of things that end up getting people killed? What would you say the industry should do to save itself from being shut down?

• (1130)

Chief Evan Bray: I've had meetings and direct conversations with people in that industry on an international basis. The reality is that even if a gun looks like a toy gun and has the orange cap on the end of it or is a completely different colour, or looks like a nerf gun, there are ways it can be converted to be real. There's no perfect solution to this, as I understand.

For example, when a gun that looks exactly like a Glock, which is the gun we carry at the Regina Police Service, is brought out and used in the commission of an offence, most of the time even police officers, in the heat of the moment, can't determine whether the firearm is real or not. It does pose an absolute threat. Oftentimes victims who are facing the barrel of one of these replica firearms have the reaction that it's real.

As I mentioned earlier, often what we're seeing are follow-up consequences. There's an initial threat when a house is rushed and some people are robbed, and what is present is a replica firearm. Then a week later we have a homicide because of retaliation that happened as a result of that initial incident. It poses threats at all levels.

I think the more we can stray from having replicas look exactly like a real firearm, the better it would be for community safety.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing here today.

Mr. Brochet, thank you for agreeing to testify before the committee today.

In your opening speech, you mentioned that you agreed with certain elements of Bill C-21, particularly the increase in maximum penalties for arms trafficking. However, you had certain reservations about Bill C-5, which removes the mandatory minimum penalties for firearm-related crimes. There is however, a link between the two.

I often give the example of William Rainville, whose story you are probably familiar with. This 25-year-old Quebecer smuggled almost 250 firearms over the border. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but obtained day parole less than a year later. This shows that arms traffickers are not necessarily hardened criminals or even have a criminal record. It is often their first offence. In my opinion, it is very rare that they receive the maximum penalty or the longest sentence associated with their crime.

In your experience, does it happen often that people are given severe penalties for arms trafficking? Will increasing the maximum penalty really have a positive impact?

Mr. Pierre Brochet: I think that increasing the maximum penalty will work in exceptional cases, like for people charged with several counts of high-level arms trafficking. It is important to get this message across.

With respect to Bill C-5, I testified before another parliamentary committee. As we explained then, we understand the aim of the bill, which is an attempt to resolve the problem of over-representation of indigenous communities and racialized groups in prison. We understand this very well. However, the entire country is dealing with an alarming rise in the use of firearms by organized crime and street gangs. We are very concerned about this, as are many Canadians. Personally, I am the chief of the Laval police service. When there are shootings in Laval, people tell me that they are thinking of moving to another city. These shootings, committed by increasingly younger suspects, incidentally, are having a major impact.

Bill C-5, which aims to remove mandatory minimum penalties for certain offences, is sending the wrong message in our opinion. Not only do we not agree with removing the mandatory minimum penalties, as we said before, we even proposed an opt-out clause. In other words, the principle of mandatory minimum penalties would be upheld in the case of firearms-related offences, but a judge could opt out based on certain criteria. That's how it's done in a number of countries. The judge could, based on certain criteria, opt out and not apply the mandatory minimum penalty in some cases.

It's an important element. As you know, there is a whole process. You can make arrests and seize firearms, but criminals are very likely to re-offend if they are freed after a short period of time. In fact, there is a high recidivism rate. Also, the message we are sending other criminals lacks strength. We're giving the impression that Canadians do not take these types of situations seriously.

• (1135)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you. That's interesting.

You talk about young people and the shootings in the Montreal area. Your organization is part of the provincial working table on violence, youth and the school environment. In this context, have you heard of other solutions that might help solve this problem?

We often hear that Bill C-21 will not solve the problem of illegal arms trafficking. In the vast majority of cases, the firearms that end up in the hands of young people in street gangs in Montreal and other large Canadian cities are illegal.

I heard you mention other measures that are needed in conjunction with those provided for in Bill C-21. For example, we should strengthen collaboration between the various police services and the Canada Border Services Agency along the border.

Can you suggest other solutions the government could implement?

Mr. Pierre Brochet: In the case of the border, we should obviously consider having mixed teams and dedicate more resources to addressing arms trafficking. That's crucial. Otherwise, there will always be far too many firearms.

It is true that we are part of the working table on street gangs. We are currently using the fund to build safer communities under an agreement with the federal government. For example, the City of Laval receives more than \$4 million in subsidies. That's not really enough to implement prevention strategies. In the short term, there are investigations, arrests and visibility activities, but the Association des directeurs de police du Québec believes that there is still an underlying problem: the suspects found in possession of firearms are increasingly young. Mr. Sauvé mentioned that. It's not normal that a 16 year-old have a firearm. In fact, this is not even a police problem, it's a social problem. That's why we want to use the funding, and perhaps other funding in the future, to adopt an integrated strategy for dealing with violence. We need to work with our partners in health care, education, the municipality and, of course, the Laval police service, as well as community groups and organizations. We are really working on a basic strategy. We want to establish a five- to ten-year plan. This is a bit like what they did in Toronto with their SafeTO project. We think it's an interesting approach if we want a long-term solution to the problem.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

We'll now go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses for helping guide our committee through its study of Bill C-21.

Chief Bray, I'd like to start with you. You made comments with regard to the red flag laws, and I know the statement on the CACP website states that you support the red flag law and "its goal to help reduce gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and self-harm by limiting access to firearms by those who pose a risk of harm to themselves or others."

We've had a lot of testimony on the proposed red flag law, and a lot of groups have problems with some sections in Bill C-21. They are worried that too much of an onus is being placed on a potential victim to go through a lengthy court process when going through the police is preferable.

Are there gaps in our current system that justify us adding this to the Criminal Code? In other words, in what instance is it preferable for someone to go through the courts to make an emergency prohibition order against someone rather than going through the police?

Chief Evan Bray: It's an important balance, and I appreciate the question.

In Saskatchewan and many provinces, families have the ability to help youth who are having problems with alcohol. We have something in Saskatchewan called the youth detox warrant, where a family goes proactively to the court and says that one of their children or a child in their care is having a problem with some sort of substance. They make an application for them to be taken in for treatment. It's a preventative measure, rather than waiting for that child to be engaged in crime and for our officers to deal with them, and then on the back end trying to get them some help through the courts.

I view the red flag law as very similar to that. It by no means is a substitute for the need for immediate action, and I've had conversations on that. There are concerns that people will feel they have to go through this lengthy administrative process and are potentially putting themselves at risk. If there's immediate risk, you should call the police; there's no question about it. However, if there's a way we don't have to wait for something to happen before police act to restrict access to firearms and we can do that in a positive way up front in a safe and secure environment, I think it's just another tool in the tool kit.

• (1140)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I appreciate that feedback. Thank you.

Moving on to the handgun freeze, you did say that the CACP is in favour of a national approach to managing the issue of handguns in Canada. You believe that a handgun freeze is one method of reducing these types of firearms, but what struck me in the second part of your statement is you said, “while allowing existing law-abiding handgun owners to practice their sport.”

I know that to be authorized to have a restricted firearm such as a handgun, you have to have proof that you practise or compete at an approved shooting club or range. There are exemptions carved out in Bill C-21 for Olympic-level and Paralympic-level shooters, but other shooting disciplines have raised concerns that they might be edged out because of how Bill C-21 is currently written.

CACP has said that it wants existing law-abiding handgun owners to be able to practise their sport. Do you believe a middle ground to this would be to require people in those other disciplines to provide more proof that they are actively engaged in their sport? In other words, should they provide actual proof that they have a demonstrated need to own a handgun?

Chief Evan Bray: The short answer to that question is yes. I think at the end of the day, the notion of firearms itself is a very divisive issue in Canada, and I think you probably see, even in some of the CACP communications, that there's a bit of a balance there. We recognize that that is a sport people are engaged in, and I think talking about Olympic or international competition is a good example of that.

I'm going to stick by a statement that I feel I've said 200 times in the last year and a half, which is that law-abiding firearm owners and possessors are usually not the problem. Predominantly they are not the ones who are causing the issue. The issue is criminals or people using them for a criminal purpose and who aren't really willing to follow the law in the first place. I think anything you can do in legislation that allows for exemptions, like legislative requirements that ensure added measures of safety are being followed, is a positive thing.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: From a policing perspective, it's about making sure that there are exemptions for other shooting disciplines, but also adding more stringent requirements to demonstrate that they are actively involved in a sport and have a demonstrated need for the handgun. Is that correct? Am I interpreting you right?

Chief Evan Bray: Yes, that's correct. I think that's a good balance.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay. Thank you for that.

With regard to airsoft guns, I appreciate the previous testimony you've given in response to other questions. I think there's a realization around this committee table that perhaps the way Bill C-21 is currently written could be amended.

You would agree with trying to put in requirements that distinguish them ultimately from the appearance of a real firearm, and putting any measures into the legislation that specify that to give police services more peace of mind when responding to calls.

Chief Evan Bray: That's correct. Yes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

That takes me to the end.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. MacGregor.

That ends our first round. Before we go into our second round, I'll observe that I've been in conversation with the clerk regarding the matter of Mr. Schiefke's point of order on props. Generally speaking, we need to follow the procedure of the House, which disallows props in the House. Therefore, we need to not use props here as well.

Thank you, Mr. Schiefke. I stand corrected.

We won't have time to do a full second round. As usual, we're kind of constrained by time, so we will do one question slot per party.

We will start with Mr. Motz for five minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

It's nice to see you again, Mr. Sauvé and Chief Bray. It's been a while.

It's interesting how different police officials from across the country have varying perspectives. As I think Chief Bray mentioned, even within the CACP there's a wide range of perspectives on the application of firearm legislation, whether it be Bill C-21 and the OIC or others from the previous iteration of Bill C-21 in the previous Parliament.

My question is simple: Do criminals follow the law?

• (1145)

Chief Evan Bray: Is that question for me, sir?

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes, for sure. I mean, I'll save you the time. We know that criminals don't follow the law. You kind of touched on that a bit.

Does having laws that predominantly target law-abiding firearm owners, as has been said by both of you in this particular testimony, really improve public safety to the degree that we need?

Chief Evan Bray: Thank you for the question.

Canada has some very good, strong firearm-related laws and regulations. When you compare us with many other countries, including the one to the south of us, they fail in comparison with what we have. We do a good job now in trying to restrict firearms and access to firearms among those who are licensed and legally able to possess them, but I think we have to focus on and consider the fact that law-abiding firearm owners are predominantly not the problem we have when we talk about this sharp increase in firearm-related crimes. It's criminals.

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes. Thank you for that.

Mr. Sauv , I have a couple of questions for you.

I appreciate some of the comments you made with regard Bill C-21 being focused incorrectly—I'm paraphrasing what you said—and also the comments that Mr. Lloyd was getting to. Mr. Bray will talk about the municipal aspect. You're talking about the confiscation of firearms, which the government wants to call the buyback program, and the impact of that on resources. If the government is expecting law enforcement to gather up these firearms, there is an impact on public safety since resources will be deployed for doing this rather than responding to public safety issues on the street.

Mr. Sauv , first, if the RCMP is required to confiscate firearms, how do you see that impacting your frontline officers, your ability to respond to hot calls to 911, for example, and public safety?

Mr. Brian Sauv : Obviously that's a good question. I think it's a discussion point that this legislation overlooks.

We have said on a number of occasions that police services in Canada, including the RCMP, are operating at minimal levels already. We're having challenges recruiting, we're having challenges with retaining and we're having challenges attracting people to the law enforcement profession. Every time we increase the mandate of police officers on the street, there has to be something that gives. Will that mean we don't respond to a mental health call from a person in crisis in the middle of the street because police officers are now tied up going to pick up guns that are no longer legal to possess?

There is an impact. In the end, do we leave it to, as Chief Bray said, another agency that may implement it? That isn't spoken to in the legislation. It isn't spoken to within the buyback program. It's going to fall to the cops on the street and the members of the RCMP. Without sustained resources, something has to fall off the plate.

Mr. Glen Motz: I agree. I think what we've seen with a lot of this current government's legislation—certainly firearm-related—is the devil is in the details, and there are no specific details to deal with this.

Chief Bray, I think you would agree that the resources in Regina and at municipal agencies across the country are in a similar boat to the RCMP and that the confiscation process is going to be problematic on your already overloaded calls for service.

Chief Evan Bray: Yes, I absolutely do agree.

Can I add one quick thing? I know you're short on time.

Here's my other worry. If we continue to prioritize calls—meaning we'll go to mental health emergencies and go to assaults in

progress—and this administrative work falls lower on the priority scale, I worry about the effect that can have on law-abiding gun owners becoming criminals once the amnesty period is closed. If it's not given a high enough priority, I think it will have a counter effect and will cause us problems on the back end as well.

Mr. Glen Motz: Exactly. That's the problem with this legislation. Bill C-21 criminalizes people who aren't criminals.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We'll now go to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Damoff, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to start with a comment. If gun ownership actually enhanced public safety, the United States would be the safest country in the world, and we know that's simply not the case.

Chief Bray, you were talking about how the red flag and yellow flag laws are just one tool in the tool box. I know that's the way our government looks at it. It's not the solution for gender-based violence or people who are contemplating suicide. It's one tool.

Legislation was changed so that a women's shelter, for example, could go to court on behalf of a woman and she could remain anonymous. If Halton police got a call from Halton Women's Place, are they able to respond, or does it have to be the actual woman that calls the police?

Chief Evan Bray: No. They would definitely be able to respond to that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

I spoke with Dr. Alan Drummond, who's an emergency room doctor. He said that when there's imminent danger it's easy for him to respond, in particular around suicide, but when there's a question about the potential, he has concerns.

I have heard this from women's organizations when there has been coercive control, for example, and someone is threatening to shoot a companion animal, like a dog. The woman hasn't been shot and hasn't been punched, but there is coercive control. This is much more difficult, and I would expect it to be more difficult for police officers to respond to that as well.

Chief Evan Bray: Yes, for sure. It's guaranteed to be a factor. That's why when you have advocates and others helping people who find themselves in a domestic situation, there's a very strong willingness on the part of law enforcement and the justice system in general to use those advocates and their influence in trying to enhance safety.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have some really specific questions around airsoft guns. Airsoft in Canada appeared here, and I know you've testified that you would like to see those guns not look at all like real guns. They have suggested they would support provisions that would require a purchase to be restricted to individuals over 18, and provisions around safe storage, safe transfer and requiring a licence to purchase an airsoft gun.

Do you see that as being a solution in terms of police response?

Chief Evan Bray: I would call it steps in the right direction. I think that's what you heard us talk about when we talked about replica firearms. Right now they look exactly like firearms, and anyone can walk in and purchase them. There's no recording of information. There's no requirement of age. There's nothing you have to be able to prove.

I think any steps we can take in a direction that restricts access to them and that allows us to do everything we can to make ourselves safe.... I still think the likeness issue is a big problem. I don't want to spend more time on it, but you can convert anything into a firearm. A ballpoint pen can be made into a firearm. I recognize that just because it may look purple and more like a nerf gun doesn't mean it's not a real gun, because it can be converted. However, I think it's less likely that this would happen than the opposite.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I was speaking with my police chief here in Halton, and he brought up the opposite point, which I hadn't thought of, that if it were only a colour issue, a real gun could be made to look like a replica.

Chief Evan Bray: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Monsieur Brochet, I wonder if you want to add anything on airsoft. What are your thoughts on those requirements versus actually changing the gun itself?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Brochet: I completely agree with Chief Bray: it's an important issue.

We regularly carry out interventions on the ground, and these are often risky. In some cases, the person has a replica firearm or a compressed air firearm. It's very risky for both the police officer and the person, since there is a risk of someone firing on the person. There is a risk of creating victims.

If we could find a way to legislate better control over these types of firearms, that would be a start.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only 30 seconds left.

Chief Bray, maybe I'll ask you this. Do you think the current penalties for trafficking in ghost guns are sufficient?

Chief Evan Bray: I don't. Especially in the area of ghost guns, I think we're deficient.

• (1155)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. Thank you very much.

Thank you to all our witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

We'll now go to Madame Michaud.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for you, Chief Bray.

As you know, in May 2020, the government issued an order in council prohibiting 1,500 military-type assault firearms. At the same time, it promised a buyback program.

According to what I have heard in the corridors of Parliament, if the government is taking so long to implement a buyback program, it's because it has no idea how to go about it and what agency to assign the task to.

I think I heard you say during your opening speech that this type of responsibility should not be given to the police. Yet, in the collective imagination, that is the impression people who own this type of firearm have: the police will break down their door and come and get their firearms, which, from one day to the next, will have become illegal. However, the government has not revealed its intentions. We don't know whether responsibility for such a program will fall on the police or another agency.

Can you clarify your statements on this subject and tell us what you would do in the government's shoes?

[*English*]

Chief Evan Bray: I very much think the importance is in the details of how this will be rolled out. Police services and police officers, as Mr. Sauvé talked about, will follow and enforce the law. The buyback program is an administrative process. At the end of the amnesty period, the law becomes the law. Police officers will be involved in that process to enforce the law at that time.

In this administrative process, I think there are lots of ways—and the CACP is advocating for alternate ways—to find these firearms to be submitted for the buyback program rather than using police resources. Could they be used through some sort of courier or mail system? Could another organization go out there and collect these firearms as they're being turned in?

Through the administrative part of this process, it's a massive amount of work. It doesn't matter where you're talking about in Canada; our frontline officers are strapped. They're being over-stretched. Their communities' expectations are much higher than what our officers are able to deliver. Sadly, we are delivering that work, but it's at the expense of our officers because of the drain on them and their mental health.

I think this added process needs to be diverted somewhere else rather than using police resources, if at all possible.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We will go to Mr. MacGregor, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For this question, I think I'll turn to Mr. Sauvé. It will again be on the subject of the red-flag laws.

I want to invite your perspective, because we've heard Chief Bray from the CACP talk about it being another avenue. We're trying to balance that with the testimony we've heard from several groups—and we've also had letters and submissions—that feel it's very troubling to place the onus on someone who might be at risk of victimization, from firearms or other dangerous devices in the home, to go through a lengthy court process.

I understand that in emergency situations, the police like to underline that you should always call the police if you believe someone's life is in danger, especially with respect to a firearm. However, if you look at the provisions in Bill C-21 and at creating this new system where someone can go through a court system and remain anonymous, are there instances, in your view, where that court system is justified? Do you support having this additional avenue for people?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: I think anything we can do in Canada to address intimate partner violence and the threats thereof is a good thing. As for challenges that we've identified, as I mentioned, I don't think Bill C-21 goes far enough, and I don't think we're looking at the downstream activities of it. For example, we've spoken already about the overburdened policing system, the expectations of the community and mandates added to police officers.

Is this going to create an extra burden in our already overburdened court system? We are seeing in a number of provinces that there are not enough Crown prosecutors, there are not enough judges and there's not enough trial space. Even if we end up in a court proceeding for a red flag or yellow flag, however that might look, is it going to be addressed in a timely manner? If it's not addressed in a timely manner, is that person continually put at risk? The downstream impacts of this are something we need to consider.

• (1200)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

That concludes this panel.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for sharing your time with us and for your expertise in helping us with our study on this bill.

I will now suspend for a couple minutes as we bring in the next panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

For the panel in the second hour, we have by video conference, as individuals, Mr. André Gélinas, retired detective sergeant, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, and Stéphane Wall, retired supervisor, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

[Translation]

I would like to welcome both of you.

Mr. Gélinas, please make your opening speech. You have five minutes.

Mr. André Gélinas (Retired Detective Sergeant, Intelligence Division, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, honourable members, hello.

My name is André Gélinas, and I am a retired detective sergeant. I worked for the information division of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal. I was asked to appear here today to share my expertise on different aspects of Bill C-21.

Before addressing the subjects of interest, I would like to clarify a few things. My presence here is apolitical and nonpartisan. For the past two years, I have been a police reporter for various media outlets on television, in newspapers and on the radio. I am not a member of any lobby or pressure group. In the past year, I have met with federal members of Parliament from every party to share my expertise and provide support for some of their projects and initiatives.

In my humble opinion, Bill C-21 fails to achieve the very noble goal of increasing public safety by ensuring effective and judicious arms control based on a pragmatic analysis of the situation.

The bill suggests that a freeze on the sale and importation of legal handguns for target practice by licence holders will have a substantial effect on the declining safety of major Canadian cities.

Moreover, by choosing to publicly announce the bill with pomp and circumstance in Montreal North, a borough that is particularly affected by street gangs, they are suggesting that there is a causal link between the violence in this neighbourhood and the handguns legally acquired and used for safe and closely supervised sports activities. This is not true. It's the result of lobbying based on an emotional and ideological analysis, certainly not on observations made by the police on the ground.

It's important for you, members of Parliament, to understand that this situation will definitely not have the desired or announced effect. An overwhelming majority of the handguns used by criminals and seized by police services after shootings and brutalities perpetrated by street gangs, criminal biker gangs and the Italian mafia were illegally acquired and originate in the United States, a country in which the sale of firearms is virtually unrestricted thanks to a constitutional right.

Only a considerable and real intensification of border controls and the right of police officers in certain indigenous territories to enforce the law could possibly help the situation. That's the only way for police services to ever solve the problem of the illegal firearms supply when demand is increasing on a daily basis. If these measures are not put in place right away, we will never be able to gain control of the situation, and there will always be more firearms entering the country than we can seize. It would be like trying to empty out the St. Lawrence River with a bucket.

This bill targets legal weapons that are used by Canadians who meet high levels of screening and training criteria imposed by the government under the supervision of the police services, when we know full well that the real problem is all the illegal handguns. No criminal worth his salt wants to procure a legal, and therefore traceable, handgun. It's simply not in their interest. We want to solve the problem of shootings, but we aren't targeting the right firearms. This bill will absolutely not have the effect it is meant to, and the situation will remain more or less the same or deteriorate if we do not adopt pragmatic solutions based on a proper analysis of the situation.

Moreover, the bill contains measures prescribing the reporting of concerns, flag laws, in order to ensure surveillance of firearm owners. That's great, and a step in the right direction. However, any police officer with any experience at all on the ground knows full well that this procedure has existed for decades. Reporting has always been part of the solution, along with preventive seizures and licence suspensions. In 1998, when I was a young constable, I preventively seized firearms during domestic violence calls. There is nothing new in this bill, and it contains absolutely no new procedures. In short, there is nothing new under the sun.

The bill also proposes creating a new offence: modifying magazines to exceed their legal capacity. This offence is useless, since simple possession of a high-capacity magazine is legal under the Criminal Code. No criminals specialize in modifying magazines. Users do it themselves. It is a very simple modification. This new offence is a solution to a nonexistent problem.

The bill also proposes raising the maximum penalty for people found guilty of firearms trafficking from 10 to 14 years. At first glance, this appears to be a good move, but no defendants have ever been sentenced to the current 10-year maximum sentence for this offence. The measure will have no real effect. It is another example of an ineffective measure.

Then the bill proposes allowing the police to obtain an electronic surveillance warrant for new firearms possession offences in sections 92 and 95 of the Criminal Code. Once again, this is a good idea that will have no real effect. These crimes are always investigated because the firearms in question are related to other criminal offences that authorize the use of electronic surveillance.

Lastly, I would like to point out the negative effects of the bill on gun clubs and sport shooters. Jobs will be lost, and there will be no new generation of people practising the sport.

• (1210)

Thank you for your time. I am prepared to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gélinas.

I will now ask Mr. Wall to make his opening speech.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Wall (Retired Supervisor, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, distinguished members of Parliament, hello.

I am a retired supervisor at the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal. I work with the media and elected officials to explain the job of police officer and the reality on the ground. I am one of the three founding members of the Communauté de citoyens en action contre les criminels violents, the CCACV, which, on January 26, 2022, recommended 16 actions at the different levels of government, including the federal level. You have just heard André Gélinas, another founding member of the CCACV. Mrs. Anie Samson, who was once deputy chair of the City of Montreal executive committee, is the third.

Victims of violent crime and their loved ones are our inspiration. We believe that, in Canada, the rights and freedoms of victims and their loved ones when it comes to life, health and safety should trump the rights and freedoms of violent criminals.

We believe that a responsible legislator must adopt laws and regulations aimed at the right targets, i.e. violent criminals, including members of street gangs and organized crime, who almost always use illegal firearms in their shootings, often from moving vehicles.

In our opinion, when we become complacent in the face of serious crimes committed by criminals who possess, discharge or point a firearm, which we appear to be doing in Bill C-5, which we also spoke about in committee, you can be sure that there will be two major social consequences. First, there will be an increase in criminals' sense of impunity, already a subject of boasting by members of street gangs on social media and in videos disseminating gangs-ta-rap culture. Second, there will be a drastic increase in the number of victims in the same neighbourhoods as the violent criminals, who are already over-represented according to Statistics Canada figures for 2021. These include Blacks, who accounted for 49% of all homicide victims in 2021, and indigenous people, among whom the homicide rate was six times higher than among the non-indigenous population in 2021.

Bill C-21 is not aiming at the right target. It is a superficial measure that will in no way reduce the number of shootings perpetrated by violent criminals, who almost always use illegal firearms. Instead of hitting the right nail, i.e. illegal firearms trafficking over the border and through indigenous reserves, it is hitting a nail that will change nothing. It targets licensed firearm owners who legitimately use their guns to hunt or practise shooting sports.

Let's look at a few measures proposed by the legislation to counter firearms trafficking.

First, the maximum sentence for firearm offences, including trafficking, is increased from 10 to 14 years. In reality, courts almost never sentence offenders to 10 years. So why would they suddenly sentence them to 14 years? The young William Rainville, for example, who was arrested in Dundee with almost 250 Polymer80 handguns and firearm receivers, was given five years in prison, but was released barely one year later.

Second, the bill proposes prohibiting companies from promoting armed violence in their sales and marketing activities. Wouldn't it be better to prohibit street gang members from promoting armed violence on social media, where they threaten their enemies with firearms, show off their impunity from justice, their invincibility, their money and their victims of procuring?

Let's compare. By using the same logic that Bill C-21 is based on, to solve the problem of drunk driving and prevent criminals on the road from causing numerous deaths, we could pass legislation prohibiting anyone, even those who are licensed and follow the rules, from owning a motor vehicle. You can see that the solution doesn't fit the problem.

What proportion of handguns used to commit crimes come from Canada? The figures I'm going to give you are taken from an online presentation by the RCMP in 2022 to the national firearms task force. In 2021, 10% of all handguns used to commit crimes were from Canada. They were therefore legal. The remaining 90% either came from the United States and therefore could not be traced, or were ghost guns designed to circumvent the law. So, in 2021, of all crimes involving handguns, 9 out of 10 were probably committed using illegal handguns. Since the beginning of 2022, 16% of all firearms used have been from Canada. In other words, of all crimes involving handguns, 8.4 out of 10 are committed using illegal handguns.

How can legislators target these illegal handguns? First, they need to ensure better surveillance at the border and around the Akwesasne reserve. They need to add cameras, drones, electronic surveillance equipment and high-speed boats, as well as patrols and border controls by the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, the Sûreté du Québec and the Ontario Provincial Police. They also need to increase the number of vehicle inspections on the roads near the border and the number of inspections of all types of motor vehicles leaving the indigenous reserve by land, sea or air. In addition, they need to implement a procedure obliging the CBSA to file criminal charges with every seizure. Prosecution is currently very rare. Also, they need to increase collaboration between the RCMP and the U.S. authorities in investigations. Lastly, they need to provide better funding for the network of informants living near the border and on indigenous reserves.

• (1215)

In conclusion, legislators must aim at the right target and not sport shooters or hunters who have the necessary licences. In addition to hunters, legislators should at least exempt sport shooters who train regularly, who are registered with a recognized shooting club and who take part in at least one competition a year to retain their acquired rights.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wall.

[*English*]

We'll start our first round of questions with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Wall and Mr. Gélinas, for sharing your expertise in criminal matters.

I have several questions for both of you.

Since 2015, there has been a 32% increase in the number of violent crimes across Canada. We know that most of the firearms used to commit these crimes are illegal.

My questions are as follows.

First, could Bill C-21 really do anything about the increase in the number of violent crimes in our communities?

Second, what measures would really be effective in countering the rise in violent crime?

Mr. André Gélinas: I will answer your question, if I may.

You are absolutely correct. In fact, Bill C-21 will do absolutely nothing, because, as my colleague Mr. Wall mentioned, the number of handguns from Canada is really too small compared with what is coming over the border. It's a disproportionate number.

The solutions are clear. We need to concentrate on the border and certain territories, in particular Akwesasne, where Canadian police services cannot intervene. They are not authorized to enter. That is where many of the firearms are coming from.

Experience has shown that illegal handguns are very present in cities like Montreal and Toronto. Geographically speaking, the Akwesasne reserve covers territory in Quebec and Ontario, as well as the United States, which is considered the main firearms producer in the world. Obviously, we will always have to deal with this, since the Canada-U.S. border is the longest land border in the world, and it is not guarded. Obviously, we can't do anything in the U.S. In other words, we can't get them to legislate to resolve their firearms problems.

• (1220)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You mentioned that 90% of all illegally procured firearms come from the United States. How are seized illegal firearms and ghost guns traced?

Mr. André Gélinas: Technically speaking, when a firearm seized by the police bears a serial number, it takes 15 seconds to find out whether it came from Canada. In Canada, handguns have been registered since the 1930s. If the firearm is not registered in Canada, we can contact our U.S. partners and give them the serial number. That number may give us the name of the person who purchased the firearm from an authorized retailer in the U.S., i.e. a firearms retailer with an American federal licence. That is how we get the information we're looking for. In that case, we know for certain that the firearm came from the United States.

The problem is that no offence was committed in the United States. The person acquires the firearm legally and, under U.S. law, can sell it to anyone without a background check.

When we seize ghost guns, there is obviously no serial number. However, by examining its frame, we can determine whether the ghost gun came from the United States. The frame is the grip, and, under the law, that is what constitutes the firearm. Most ghost guns have a Polymer80 frame. This American manufacturer operates legally in the U.S., but it's illegal to sell its products in Canada. So when we find a ghost gun with a Polymer80 frame, we can be certain it came from the United States.

Once again, it's a way of determining virtually for certain that the vast majority of firearms come from the U.S.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Bill C-5, introduced by the Liberals, eliminates mandatory prison sentences for violent gun crimes and allows these criminals to be put under house arrest in our communities.

What impact do policies like the ones in Bill C-5 have on the safety of Canadian communities? Do they contribute to the increase in violent crimes?

Mr. André Gélinas: Bill C-5 undermines our judicial system and boosts the arrogance of criminal groups. Criminals study their surroundings and get advice from their lawyers. So, when they're told that there are no more mandatory minimum penalties, there are no longer any deterrents.

The other element in this regard is that criminals look at what is going on around them. When I tell you that they study their surroundings, I mean that they look at Bill C-21 and realize that the government is targeting people with licences who, in the vast majority of cases, are not a problem. The message this sends to criminals is that the government is not focusing on the real problem. It's abolishing minimum mandatory penalties and continues to intervene in areas where there appear to be no problems at all.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Schiefke for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gélinas and Mr. Wall, I would like to start by thanking you for the work you do to protect our families and communities.

I would like to talk about ghost guns. As you know, there has been a proliferation of ghost guns because of 3D printers and access to firearm components online. We are looking for solutions to this problem, whether via Bill C-21 or regulations.

Mr. Gélinas and Mr. Wall, would you be in favour of measures to regulate the possession, sale and importation of firearm components, such as barrels and slides, which are used to make ghost guns?

Mr. André Gélinas: Absolutely.

It is absurd that, today, a person with a little technical skill can print a 3D firearm frame, or procure one illegally, and that they can also purchase a barrel, a slide, magazines and a trigger, all of the peripheral components needed to make a gun with a 3D-printed frame.

If we really want to do something concrete, we at least need to require Canadian retailers to verify that anyone who wants to procure firearm components has a licence to possess and acquire firearms. No sport shooters or hunters would be averse to such a measure, since it is merely common sense. It's unacceptable that anyone who does not have a licence to acquire firearms and is neither a hunter or a sport shooter can procure magazines and firearm components. It makes no sense. It's so obvious, that we wonder why it hasn't been done yet.

• (1225)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Mr. Gélinas.

Would you also agree with this type of measure, Mr. Wall?

Mr. Stéphane Wall: Yes.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: I have another question. This being said, I think that Mr. Gélinas has already answered it.

Would you also be in favour of a regulation that would specify the number of firearm components an authorized owner could import and that would limit the possibility of purchasing firearm components to licence holders?

Mr. Stéphane Wall: My answer is the same as the one Mr. Gélinas just gave you.

Effectively, that's crucial. Any bill would absolutely have to address this issue. We can't get around it. Possessing a firearms licence brings with it certain privileges. If we pretend that the problem doesn't exist and we don't do anything to fix the situation, we will have missed the point.

So my answer is yes.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: I would also like to broach the topic of compressed air guns.

Many experts and police officers across the country have requested a ban on the sale of compressed air guns, since they look too much like real firearms. This proposition is not popular among compressed air gun users, of whom there are many in the community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges. They would like to find a solution, but they find that a ban goes too far.

Another possible solution would be to regulate compressed air guns the same way firearms are currently regulated.

Would you be in favour of limiting the sale of compressed air guns to people aged 18 and over?

Mr. André Gélinas: Yes, you're absolutely right. That would be one solution, or at least a start. It's not normal that young adolescents can purchase compressed air guns. Also, police officers often find this type of weapon in the hands of street gang members, who use them precisely because they look like real firearms. As others have said before me, this confusion can also cause a police officer to shoot.

That being said, age should be a criterion. I would even say that I wouldn't be against making adults who use compressed air guns get a firearms licence. That would allow...

Mr. Peter Schiefke: You've just answered my next question, Mr. Gélinas, thank you for that.

What do you think, Mr. Wall?

Mr. Stéphane Wall: I, too, am in complete agreement. I'm going to continue where Mr. Gélinas left off.

I was a station supervisor and patrol officer for a long time. We did indeed receive calls and arrested people who had in their possession an airgun that was a replica firearm. This can certainly be a source of confusion for patrol officers. Even though there haven't been many cases of police officers having to neutralize an individual holding an airgun, it has happened in the past. We absolutely have to avoid this type of situation.

A sixteen-year-old kid who with an airgun tucked into his belt could simply want to get rid of it in front of police officers, without necessarily threatening anyone. But police officers analyze a situation in a matter of seconds, and if the firearm looks real, tragic accidents can occur. It has happened a few times in Canada. Such situations must be avoided.

Earlier on, someone spoke about the possibility of changing the way these firearms are manufactured so that they do not resemble real firearms. The manufacturing process would have to be completely overhauled. Even if we put colours on the replica guns or toys, a young person could simply paint the thing black, for example. We need much stricter measures.

We could also think about making parents aware of certain conditions that their children should abide by when they use airguns. That would be another step in the right direction.

• (1230)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schiefke.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for agreeing to come and testify today before the committee. We are grateful for your expertise. Both your positions on this issue are clear and pretty similar. You're saying that Bill C-21 will not help with the problem of illegal firearms trafficking, and I pretty much agree with you.

Mr. Wall, you suggested other solutions that, in my opinion, would not necessarily require legislative amendments and could be put into place in a parallel fashion, such as investing more money and sending more resources to the border.

Mr. Gélinas, you mentioned that certain clauses contained in the bill were ineffectual, such as those that pertain to altered cartridge magazines and increased maximum sentences. I would like to know which clauses contained in Bill C-21 you support or find truly useful, but I get the impression that your answer will be rather short.

To help you along, I should inform you that I'm going to submit an amendment to the committee once we start the clause-by-clause study of the bill, with the aim of adding a clear definition of assault-style military guns to the Criminal Code. Because of the way the government proceeded when it published the amnesty order prohibiting 1,500 models of firearms, these firearms are still on the market, including the SKS carbine, a model that was used recently to kill police officers.

Do you think that we could strengthen Bill C-21 by including clauses on assault-style guns or on ghost guns and tracing, as was suggested earlier? In your opinion, what amendments could be made to the bill that would be necessary and useful?

I would ask Mr. Wall to answer first. Then Mr. Gélinas.

Mr. Stéphane Wall: I will answer the first part of your question.

Which amendments contained in the bill seem logical to us? I would say that it would be the clauses that give more powers to the border services officers when they look at the files of immigrants who are coming into Canada, whether those persons are coming through Roxham Road or have applied for visas. If some of those persons are implicated in a crime committed in Canada, it would be terrific if the border services officer could quickly access that information when they are processing the file. Those would be logical clauses that could have a beneficial impact in the medium and long term.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: That's interesting. Thank you, I've made a note of that.

Mr. Gélinas, what do you think?

Mr. André Gélinas: As Mr. Wall has explained, all the clauses that deal with immigration, i.e., those that prevent violent individuals who have used firearms from becoming citizens of our country, are vital. Those are most welcome.

As you have stated, I don't believe that this bill contains much apart from superficial measures based on ideology and emotions. I think that we could do quite a few things, such as reinforcing our resources at the border, as was said earlier. It's a well-known secret that police officers cannot intervene on certain first nations reserves, where the rule of law simply does not apply. Criminals have the luxury of choosing where along the 6,000 to 7,000 kilometre-long border they want to bring illegal goods into Canada. Obviously, there are areas where it's much easier because the police do not have access and are not politically authorized to intervene. Logically, criminals will favour these areas. They will pay members of organized crime syndicates who are on these reserves to make sure that their goods are protected. We can stick our heads in the sand and pretend that the problem doesn't exist, but those guns are coming up through the border via these reserves and are killing and wounding people on the streets of Montreal and Toronto, mainly.

• (1235)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Would you like to add something Mr. Wall?

Mr. Stéphane Wall: Yes, please allow me to add one final thing to complete Mr. Gélinas' answer.

As former police officers, we understand that the authorities might be reluctant to intervene on a first nations reserve. The issue is extremely sensitive, due to the fact that there have been crises in the past. We are suggesting working around the reserves. We could have surveillance on all the roads that lead to reserves and carry out a large number of inspections. We would like to increase the number of inspections carried out on vehicles leaving the reserves and headed towards Toronto and Montreal. We should also carry out more inspections on waterways situated near reserves and intercept a greater number of boats. We have to give the police officers of the Ontario Provincial Police, the Sûreté du Québec and the RCMP who are patrolling these waterways more resources that will enable them to intervene.

We also have to sign cooperation agreements with the Americans. We know that if a gunrunner on a boat decides to flee the police, the police officers will abandon the chase and head back to base once he gets to the United States.

Basically, we have to cooperate better, get the necessary logistical tools and work around the reserves if we do not wish to cause a political crisis involving first nation reserves. That is the way to proceed.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor, for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Monsieur Gélinas, I'd like to start with you, please.

In your opening remarks, you covered many different parts of Bill C-21. You mentioned the fact that there are existing red flag provisions in the Criminal Code, and that's true. If you look at existing sections 109 and 110, there are mandatory prohibition orders and discretionary prohibition orders.

I think the testimony we've received on the proposed addition through Bill C-21 of this red flag law is probably what we as a committee are struggling with the most. A number of witnesses are quite concerned that the provisions in Bill C-21 are going to unfairly place the onus on someone who might be the victim of firearms-related violence to go through an already overburdened court system by themselves.

We've certainly heard from police services what their primary wish is: If someone finds themselves in a threatening position, they should always go to the police first. In our previous panel, Chief Evan Bray of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said that, absolutely, police should always be used as a first resort. However, he was also in favour of other avenues being available to people.

Do you see any instances where the provisions in Bill C-21—these new red flag provisions and going through a court system—might be preferable to using the police?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Gélinas: As you have stated, in practice, most of the red flag clauses exist already. For example, when a person calls the Canadian Firearms Centre, one of the first things that they are asked is if he or she has concerns regarding their partner or another person. If the answer is yes, that person will immediately be put through to the relevant authorities.

That said, I fully support what the other police officers who testified before me have stated: when a person is in danger, the first people to call are always the police. It would take an inordinate amount of time to go before the courts to try and get a firearm licence suspended, as is proposed in these amendments, and the courts are already overwhelmed.

The problem, as I see it, is that people can go before the courts to explain their point of view in good faith, but the judge won't get the police officers' perspective. Police officers have information that the judge cannot access at that time. For example, the judge does not have access to data banks or to police expertise. He or she will simply have to base their decision on the person before them who has expressed their concerns.

Finally, I have to say that this clause could also be used for fraudulent reasons or revenge, especially when it comes to disputes between ex-partners. As we know, anything goes if you want to hurt a former partner, unfortunately. This could be a way to—

• (1240)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Gélinas.

[*English*]

I'm sorry, but I have to get to another question. Thank you for that answer.

Monsieur Wall, I'd like to talk to you.

In your opening statement, you mentioned the fact that sport shooters who belong to clubs and practise regularly with their handguns should be exempt from Bill C-21. Chief Evan Bray of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police confirmed the same thing. It is his position that a handgun freeze is one method of reducing access to these types of firearms, but he does support law-abiding handgun owners' ability to practise their sport.

I asked him if we could find a middle ground here by imposing stricter requirements for membership, demonstrating an actual need for the handgun through regular practice and so on. Do you have any further comments on the middle ground that we're trying to reach with respect to the provisions in Bill C-21

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Wall: I agree with Chief Bray.

In terms of accommodations or amendments that need to be integrated into the bill, if the bill passes as it is now, at the very least we would need measures to accommodate hunters and sport shooters. Sport shooters are already members of a shooting club. Could we add more conditions, for example requiring that sport shooters, in addition to their regular training sessions, participate in a shooting competition at least once a year? That way, sport shooters who already have a licence and who are truly practising the sport could be exempted from all the measures contained in the bill.

Let's be clear: we have a bill on handguns, but are they really a problem in Canada? We know what the problem is and we have to start tackling it head-on. The problem is that in every big Canadian city, nine times out of 10, members of street gangs and organized crime syndicates are using illegal firearms to commit crimes. That's what legislators should be targeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We will now proceed to the second round. Once again, this round will have to be abbreviated.

We will go to Mr. Shipley for five minutes, please.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today, and thank you for the service you've put in for many years.

I'm sure that over the many years you've worked, you've heard about how tough it is to get enough resources to do your job, and that hasn't changed. We've heard quite a bit over these hearings that it's getting tougher and tougher, so I'd like your opinion on this, please.

In 2021, the SPVM launched a new police unit, the integrated team against firearms trafficking. Between February and August 2021, it carried out 19 searches, made 17 arrests and seized 27 illegal weapons, which was obviously good work.

Do you feel that Bill C-21 could lead in the direction of using already strained police resources and could actually hinder targeted teams like this from doing their job by removing resources?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Gélinas: If I may, I would like to answer this question.

Bill C-21 in no way meets the needs of the police. You are absolutely right on that point. We don't have enough police officers. We can't even replace the police officers that retire every year. When we set up special units to deal with urgent situations, we are taking away officers from other units that are deemed less important but actually are important.

Yes, we should be welcoming and encouraging police seizures. However, we should realize that we are seizing just a minute portion of all the guns coming into the country. As my colleague said, an individual was stopped last year with 249 guns in his possession. You know, criminals only have to be lucky once, whereas we, the police, have to be lucky all the time. Obviously, when an individual is stopped with 249 firearms in his possession, we can't even imagine the massive number of guns that are coming into the country without being intercepted. From that point of view, it is obvious that we will always be trying to catch up.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Shipley: Do you think one of the negative consequences of Bill C-21 is that we could see an increase in smuggling operations, since legal handguns would be unavailable for purchase? Do you think it could cause an increase in smuggling?

Perhaps I'll go to Mr. Wall for that.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Wall: No, I do not think that the measures contained in the current bill will have any real impact on this issue.

[English]

Mr. Doug Shipley: Mr. Gélinas, you mentioned in your opening remarks that no smuggler had received the current maximum sentence of 10 years, so adding more years is really not doing anything. I'm very interested to hear about that. Today was the first time I've heard it.

Do you have any more data on that? Where did you get that resource from? What types of sentences are you seeing them get handed for smuggling?

[Translation]

Mr. André Gélinas: I don't have any figures to give you, but based on my experience and my discussions with many colleagues who are also firearms specialists and who are still working, I can give you an idea.

For example, let's talk about something that happened last year. I mentioned it earlier. William Rainville was sentenced to four or five years in prison, but only spent one year in a federal penitentiary.

Obviously, the maximum mandatory sentences provided for in the Criminal Code are rarely imposed, and by that I mean almost never. This is due to case law, whereby judges are bound by previous decisions. Increasing the maximum sentence to 14 years can seem like a good idea, but how can we even think that this measure will be effective, when we know that 10-year sentences are rarely handed down?

The same logic applies to nearly every crime. Maximum sentences are only given in rare cases.

[English]

Mr. Doug Shipley: I'd like to address my last question, in the time remaining, to Mr. Gélinas and Mr. Wall, because you both made very interesting comments. You each worded them a little differently, but in your opening remarks you both made very similar statements.

Mr. Gélinas, you said that Bill C-21 should be targeting real weapons. I hope nothing was lost in translation, but that's the way it came across. Mr. Wall, you said that Bill C-21 was not aimed at the right target. Perhaps you could expand on those two statements, gentlemen.

[Translation]

Mr. André Gélinas: As I said previously, only 10% to 16% of guns seized after a crime is committed are handguns that come from Canada. And yet, all the measures contained in the bill target people who have a licence, who have been vetted and who are very rarely implicated in crime, even though there is no such thing as zero risk. I think we're missing the target here. We have abolished mandatory minimum sentences for criminals and we don't have enough resources at the border, whereas it is precisely through the border that the firearms are coming in. I don't think we're targeting the right things here.

Mr. Stéphane Wall: As for me, I would go back to—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Wall, you can finish your answer quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Wall: As for me, I would go back to the comparison with traffic accidents caused by drunk drivers, who are criminals at the wheel. It is an absolute scourge. Drunk driving was the cause of many deaths every year. However, it would be completely illogical if the government decided to banish from the roads all vehicles and all good drivers who have a driving licence.

We have to fight the problem and find the right solution without targeting the entire population.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

[English]

We'll now go to Mr. Van Bynen, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I get into my questions, I want to be absolutely sure that the evidence being provided here and considered by this committee is actually based on fact and not opinion. I suggest that there is no evidence of lawlessness on the reserves. In fact, police services have appeared as witnesses on guns and gangs, and there is no evidence that there's more lawlessness on reserves than there is in any urban area or any population. In addition to that, there's no evidence that there is an epidemic of gun crime from immigrants who are crossing at Roxham Road. I just want to make sure this record actually reflects fact and not necessarily opinion.

Having said that, I will ask Mr. Wall a question.

The City of Montreal's council adopted a measure first proposed by your organization, the CCACV, to implement a helpline for parents. Having in mind that prevention is important, this helpline intended to ensure that if there was a risk of children falling into violence, there was some help for them.

Do you think having this type of project at a national level would be helpful?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Wall: Thank you for the question. I see that you have done your homework.

Yes, on January 26, the CCACV did indeed send two letters to the media and gave a press conference to propose certain measures to the three levels of government in the fight against gun-related violence. We presented measures both in terms of prevention and repression.

For example, one of the first preventative measures that we suggested to the City of Montreal was approved three weeks after our press conference. We suggested a helpline, which would offer a sympathetic ear and practical help to parents who are seeing their children get caught up in violence.

The truth is that parents cannot keep up with technology at the same speed as their children. The kids are always two steps ahead: they use social media and deal and network with shady people and their parents can't keep up. However, sometimes mom or dad realize that their child has more money than they ever had before, that the child is no longer obeying the parents' rules or the house rules, that there is a change in attitude or behaviour and that the child smells like they've been taking drugs. In this type of situation, parents often find themselves at a loss. If there were a helpline managed by a team of specialists, parents would be able to dial a number and get advice.

The City of Montreal is studying the situation to determine which organization will manage the helpline. We hope that the organization will be selected in the coming weeks or months and that there will be a publicity campaign to inform parents of the existence of the centre. The resources provided could help parents understand what is going on with their children before they become violent criminals. It's a choice. We have to help parents behave responsibly when their children are very young. They have to be attentive. If they see that their child is getting into trouble and they call the centre to get some advice, we could prevent many young people from getting involved in a life of crime.

[English]

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Would you support the Government of Canada making investments in frontline community organizations that could help shoulder the burden of community safety? For example, do you support the investment of approximately \$565 million in support of 684 crime prevention interventions that have been funded through the national crime prevention strategy?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Wall: Absolutely. We have to invest in prevention.

[English]

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Would you support the \$122.7 million that has supported 47 gang prevention and diversion projects, funded through the youth gang prevention fund, since 2017?

Would you also support the \$250 million investment the government has made through the building safer communities fund, which provides direct funding to municipalities to strengthen local efforts and counter the social conditions that would lead to anti-social behaviour?

Do all of those programs make sense to you, sir?

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Wall: I don't know them all, but I would say that we have to invest in prevention.

We know that for community organizations, the problem is that there is no regular source of funding. All levels of government should provide long-term financing for projects, rather than for one or two years only. That way, the organizations wouldn't constantly have to apply for grants. The funding has to be regular and there must be some sort of accountability requirement. That's very important.

[English]

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you for that.

I think sustainability for these organizations is important.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minute.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, I would like to pick up where we left off a little while ago, when we were talking about the rather sensitive issue of intervening in first nations communities.

I have suggested many times to the Minister of Public Security setting up a type of joint tactical squad made up of the police forces that you mentioned earlier, i.e., the Sûreté du Québec, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Akwesasne Police, as well as the New York Police, if such a squad doesn't already exist. As we know, the issue of first nations territories is a very complex one, which means that we have to bring multiple stakeholders together, including border services officers.

This squad could be set up in way similar to Quebec's CENTAURE strategy. The Government of Quebec poured funds into this strategy and has made other investments that seem to be more practical in Quebecers' minds. I get the impression that it seems a lot more practical when someone tells me, for example, that they are purchasing a boat so that police officers can patrol the water ways, because firearms can be brought in by crossing the river, or that they are buying a snowmobile, because firearms trafficking goes on even in the winter.

However, we have to remind ourselves that border control falls under federal jurisdiction. So shouldn't it rather be the job of the federal government to invest the funds and create a joint tactical squad that would allow all stakeholders to communicate? I think that what Quebec has done is very good, but isn't that the type of action that the federal government has to take? Please tell me what you think.

Mr. André Gélinas: The border is obviously under federal jurisdiction, as well as anything that concerns first nations.

I heard someone say that there is no proof that the rule of law doesn't apply on reserves. To me, that is insulting the intelligence of police officers. I would really love to be able to remember a single firearms seizure operation on a reserve, but nothing comes to mind.

You are right to say that the solution requires joint and multi-stakeholder groups. In order for that to be socially acceptable, we have to bring in first nations police, along with federal, municipal and provincial police forces. We are lacking manpower, but we could be stronger together and everyone could bring their expertise to bear on the problem.

Mr. Stéphane Wall: Please allow me to complete that answer.

Quebec did indeed set up a good strategy. We have a boat, a snowmobile and six extra first nations police officers on the Akwesasne reserve. It is not enough, though, given that the body of water is huge and that the first nation traffickers own high-speed boats. When the police boat leaves one shore, the gunrunners speed toward the other shore with their load. I am talking about firearms, but there are other goods being handled by first nations traffickers, organized crime syndicates and street gangs, such as drugs. These people work together. The primary victims of crimes committed by the first nations traffickers, who represent a minority within their community, are first nations people who live on the reserve. We have to think of these victims when we are drawing up laws and joint strategies that the various police forces will enforce.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

We'll now go to Mr. MacGregor for the final questions.

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Monsieur Gélinas, I'd like to turn to you.

I read a brief from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, and they noted that Canada has one of the highest rates of suicide by firearms in the developed world. Some 75% of Canada's firearms deaths are in fact by suicide. That completely eclipses deaths by homicide. Of course, they note too that guns are a particularly lethal method. They have a lethality rate of over 90%, so nine out of 10 suicide attempts via firearm are successful.

This goes into the theme of the red flag law. The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians has consistently called for a point of care mechanism to allow emergency physicians to directly report to police authorities any individual with a medical condition that substantially increases the risk of inappropriate firearms use and the potential for firearm injury and death.

In your experience, what is the relationship like between the police and medical personnel currently? What are your thoughts on

what they are asking for? In what ways do our laws need to be bolstered so that physicians can more effectively communicate to police that someone might be at risk of using a firearm, either against themselves or against another person?

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Gélinas: The question is relevant. I myself have a friend who is a doctor and he had to make that kind of call and it was extremely difficult. I would suggest a direct line for health care professionals. It would allow them to communicate directly with the relevant authorities so that they may decide if an intervention is necessary and, if that is indeed the case, so that it can be planned.

My friend had to talk to approximately 10 people before a patrol officer called him back, and he didn't really understand the situation. He was ready to go and meet the person, but that would have put the doctor in danger. Obviously, we have to protect the person that makes the call. The Collège des médecins du Québec has stated that doctors are no longer bound by patient confidentiality when there is reason to believe that firearms present a potential danger.

I think that there should be a separate communication channel so that doctors can speak directly with the relevant authorities, without having to wait and be transferred from one person to the other. They have to be able to immediately speak with a person who is knowledgeable about gun licences as well as the various ways of intervening.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Thank you to all the witnesses for sharing your time and expertise with us today and for helping us in our study. That concludes our meeting. Thank you all for your time and attention as well.

With that, we are adjourned.

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