

The AMM is pleased to have the opportunity to make a formal presentation on the new Police Service Act. This is an important piece of legislation for all Manitobans and particularly for municipalities, as protective services are a key municipal responsibility. Safe communities are more than just an expectation, they are the cornerstone of a healthy and sustainable community. Because of the importance of policing the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, as the umbrella group that represents all municipalities in the province, would like to provide some comments and suggestions on the proposed act.

### Police Boards

The move in this Bill to force elected councils to appoint a board to oversee local police services is counterintuitive and takes direct responsibility for policing out of the hands of those elected to run the force. Municipalities certainly understand the need to be transparent in their decision making process, and today's municipal council is more transparent and accountable to the people they serve than at any other time in history. If a local resident has a question about a municipal decision they are well aware who is their local representative, and often knows them on a first name basis. Nearly all municipalities in the province have a website or an electronic way to communicate with citizens. Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs has worked with municipalities and our association to make municipal government in Manitoba an open process. Perhaps most importantly municipal councils face the electorate every four years. There are plenty of mechanisms already in place for citizens to stay informed on the decisions their council is taking, and there are opportunities to replace representatives if those decisions are not in tune with the desires of the local community.

Municipalities are concerned that moving the oversight of the local police force away from the elected council and into the purview of an appointed board will not deliver a more transparent and accountable system of police oversight. Should Bill 16 be passed as it is currently written these appointed boards will have control over the hiring of the police chief and can also hire officers. As currently suggested, Police Boards will set the direction of the municipal police force and will take on supervisory responsibilities as well. Police boards will be charged with the duties of establishing priorities and objectives for the police service, and must monitor the police chief to ensure compliance of community needs and values.

While the Bill leaves the final responsibility for the police budget with the local council, the Police Board will be advising council on what is required. Even if on paper the final authority lies with the council, it will be extremely difficult for the municipal council to refuse the requests of the police board. This creates the potential for conflict within the community between the appointed board and elected council on financial support for the police force. Municipal councils are expected to balance their budget taking in all factors including limited revenues, increasing responsibilities and escalating infrastructure needs. Most of the communities outside Winnipeg that have their own police force are able to hold police costs to under 20% of their total budget. This is done through a careful examination and balancing of the total needs of the community. The police board will have a single focus and is unlikely to provide a balanced review of community needs prior to submitting their financial request to council. This leaves municipal councils in the untenable position of having to either refuse the request of the local board or succumb to the request at the expense of other community priorities.

While the goal of mandatory police boards is to provide greater citizen oversight into the management of local police services, we believe this is unnecessary and will in fact only complicate the process further. The need for mandatory boards is also reduced due to the other positive changes in the new Act. The AMM is supportive of the creation of a Provincial Police Commission as we see the merit in having a province-wide civilian-led commission that can advise government on directions. The AMM is also supportive of an Independent Investigative Unit that will handle those cases involving police use of fatal force, serious injury and other incidents.

Policing is certainly a core municipal responsibility, and one municipal councils do not take lightly. Community leaders know that to build and sustain a healthy community public safety is paramount. While we can fully support the need to make communities safer and support the need to make the system more transparent, we do not believe turning over control of local police forces from elected municipal councils to appointed boards will meet this objective.

Therefore, The AMM requests the Province to amend Bill 13 to make police boards voluntary for municipalities.

We want to thank the committee for providing our association the opportunity to comment on the bill and would be pleased to respond to any questions of the committee.