



First United is an outreach ministry of the United Church of Canada and serves as an emergency shelter and service centre in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood. We have a 130-year history in this neighbourhood, and we strive to offer low-barrier, harm-reduction oriented services to people in the DTES. In addition to our emergency shelter, our programs and services include community meals, tax filing, community ministry, access to emergency clothing, hygiene, and harm reduction supplies, and legal advocacy.

We are providing the following recommendations to the BC Legislative Assembly of British Columbia's Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act. We are thankful to the BC Civil Liberty Associations work in developing their policy primer that distills needed to changes to the Police Act.

1. Aligning the Police Act with UNDRIP

The UNDRIP is based on principles that are aimed at repairing the damage caused to Indigenous people, mostly as a result of colonialism. In implementing these principles, it is impossible to ignore the significant role played by the Police which involved displacing and punishing the practice of Indigenous culture.

Police reform should therefore involve recognition of the rights of Indigenous People to self-determination and not subject any Indigenous Nation to Police authority without seeking consent first.

2. Ban on Street Checks

The exercise of police power currently includes discretion to stop and check people on the streets which is clearly too broad and often results in misuse. Statistics have shown that Indigenous and Black people are more negatively impacted by such police encounters.

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Located on unceded X^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam),
Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), & Səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) lands.

It is therefore not enough to simply reduce street checks as there is the need to actively prohibit the exercise of such discretionary powers.

3. Shift from Policing to Community Safety and Decriminalization

The Police should not be the only resource for handling societal issues as not all situations call for police intervention. The approach adopted by the police is not suitable for some situations and police presence in such cases can cause fear in the victim or exacerbate the situation, particularly where there are language barriers or mental health issues involved.

Restorative justice and other approaches to resolving crime could also be explored so police involvement in societal issues is limited. There are too many cases of wellness checks that result in Indigenous or Black people being killed by police. Our advocacy program has seen cases where police wellness checks have resulted in tenants being evicted for the disturbance that the police cause.

Prioritizing community safety requires the decriminalizing of sex work, drug possession, public intoxication, poverty, immigration status, and Indigenous land defense. Policing as a tool is not the appropriate response to deal with public health crises and significant societal issues. We are in the midst of two public health emergencies, the COVID pandemic and the opioid crisis. In the DTES, we have seen significant deaths related to a toxic drug supply, especially during the COVID pandemic. We also see a significant criminalization of the residents in the DTES through drug possession offences and violation tickets for infractions such as public drunkenness and jay walking.

4. Overhaul of Police Accountability, Oversight, and Governance Bodies

The common perception of police accountability in BC is that there is a lack of independence and transparency in police oversight. Put simply, it is understood that police departments answer to no one but themselves. There must be civilian, transparent, and independent oversight bodies.

5. Moratorium on Police Use of Force and Surveillance Technologies

The development and implementation of policing and surveillance technologies needs to be significantly curtailed. Too often these technologies breach individual rights such as the recent Clearview AI facial recognition software. Due to institutional racism and bias,

the police should not carry lethal force weapons in Indigenous, Black, and low-income neighbourhoods.

Please accept these submissions to the BC Legislative Assembly of British Columbia's Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act on behalf of the First United Church Community Ministry Society.

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