

POLICE CHIEF SAYS PROVINCE'S DECISION WILL COST TAXPAYERS

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Halton Police Chief Stephen Tanner says a provincial decision to decommission Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) at large prisons across Ontario, will have a significant impact on the Halton taxpayer if not reversed.

The chief noted during a meeting of the Halton Police Board on Oct. 3 that Halton police currently have three PLOs who work full-time at Maplehurst Correctional Complex and the Vanier Centre for Women in Milton.

These officers, Tanner noted, carry out criminal investigations inside the prison for which Halton police receive funding from the Province.

This year that funding amounted to \$400,000.

"There is so much work

to do inside that correctional facility. The correctional officers cannot do criminal investigations. They cannot do drug charges," said Tanner.

"We're there to deal with the hundreds of assaults, the drug investigations and our officers also play a role every time there is a situation where a provincial correctional officer lays his hands on an inmate."

Tanner said he was recently contacted by the Ministry of the Solicitor General who informed him that effective Dec. 31, 2019 any agreement between the Ministry and Halton police for policing service in correctional institutions is terminated.

"Moving forward, correctional services will leverage its own intelligence resources including filed intelligence officers and institutional security teams

to gather intelligence within facilities to identify potential threats, prevent drug trafficking, and detect contraband items," wrote Assistant Deputy Minister Christina Danylchenko in a letter to Tanner, which was provided to insidehalton.

"The government is committed to working with our policing partners to ensure that criminal matters in our correctional facilities are identified and appropriately investigated."

Tanner noted correctional services has always done its own intelligence work and emphasized that is not what his officers do there.

While Halton police will no longer have a presence in Maplehurst they will still be required to return to the prison every time a criminal investigation needs to be carried out.

Tanner says this will create efficiency and budget issues since Halton police will no longer receive provincial funding for this work.

"This may add 20-25 minutes to every assault investigation there. Every officer from Milton who goes to Maplehurst will have to go through security and all those processes," said Tanner.

"Frankly it's a total mess. It's one of the worst decisions I have ever seen from an operational perspective."

In her letter Danylchenko says the Province is moving to establish a standardized approach to police engagement across the correctional system.

She said this will ensure a consistent and effective response to criminal matters as well as improve collaboration on intelligence

gathering.

The Assistant Deputy Minister said this change would have no impact on the safety and security of Maplehurst or the Vanier Centre and noted the same process is in place at 21 institutions across the province, which do not have PLOs onsite.

Tanner said those 21 institutions are small prisons and as such having no PLOs makes sense because police are only called upon to conduct criminal investigations every now and again.

Maplehurst, Tanner pointed out, has around 1,800 inmates and is the site of one third of the assaults that take place in Halton.

"What we've heard today tells me that they are contemplating a change without having worked out the details first and this has been a hallmark of the

new government," said Oakville Mayor and Halton Police Board Chair Rob Burton.

"I think it would be appropriate for the board to write back to the Solicitor General to advise that changes are better when they are thoroughly thought through and consulted with the recipients of the change then adapted. When it's just announced you end up with scrambling. Scrambling always costs more."

Tanner noted he and the board plan to push back against the proposed changes.

"This will have impacts on the correctional officers and on the facility and certainly on the police service," said Tanner.

"There's also no way the citizens of Halton should have to pay more money than any other citizen in Ontario for policing just because there is a very large provincial correctional facility in Halton."



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