

Saint John Police statement in response to a Saint John Police Association press conference held on September 29, 2023, and their letter sent to the New Brunswick Minister of Public Safety

Written by Sean Rocca | September 29, 2023 at 04:57:pm

The Saint John Police takes public and officer safety seriously as it is our paramount responsibility. To use public and officer safety to further a political agenda to support another union is deeply disturbing and bordering on irresponsible.

As part of the Saint John Police contingency planning for a labour disruption that would affect our Public Safety Communications Centre (PSCC - 911 Centre), a number of stakeholders were consulted including the Executive of the Saint John Police Association (SJPA).

On August 21, 2023, senior police leaders met with the President and Vice President of the SJPA and discussed the possibility of a prolonged contingency plan for the PSCC. The SJPA agreed that the plan would first rely on senior management to staff the PSCC. In the event of a prolonged labour disruption, the SJPA asked that only then would their members be lawfully ordered to compliment the existing resources.

As the labour dispute entered into the medium and long-term stages, consideration was given to request senior SJPA members to assist. Initially four members were requested to assist in the PSCC. Two of those members complied while two others asked to be ordered. Once ordered, one complied with the order and the fourth refused a lawful order which is a violation of the Police Act of New Brunswick. As a result, that lone member is facing a Police Act investigation which is a normal practice when an officer violates the Police Act. It should be noted that other SJPA members have come forward and volunteered to serve in

the PSCC and are currently receiving training.

The training for new hire civilian members of the PSCC is extensive. In the case of the contingency planning, and to meet our public safety mandate, every member going into the PSCC to assist was given one day of classroom training and continuous hands-on training under the supervision of other experienced members. Our police officers have been training their entire careers to respond to emergency and non-emergency public safety concerns, both in person and over the telephone. This is not a new experience for any of our sworn members.

As part of the contingency plan, we have senior police managers on shift in the PSCC at all times. The civilian managers are highly proficient with technology and various applications. The combination of these two entities provides a solid foundation to fulfill our mandate during this labour dispute.

The 911 system is intact and there is no additional delay in response. The 911 calls are answered by the Fredericton Police Force Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) and directed to the appropriate emergency service provider as required. This process is not unusual as all PSAPs provide back-up to each other, which is how the system is designed in order to ensure all calls are answered. The City of Saint John cyber attack in 2020 was the best example of how this service and continuity of operations was tested. At that time, all 911 calls were diverted to the Fredericton PSAP for over one month.

The statement made by the SJPA with respect to the PSCC being a “ticking time bomb” is completely inaccurate and without fact. Realistically, it is completely the opposite. Calls have not been dropped or unanswered. Emergency and non-emergency calls are dealt with in a professional and timely manner. The PSCC continues to operate efficiently under the current contingency plan and did so even during a large-scale fire at AIM and post-tropical storm Lee.

To date, we have had zero complaints reported from the public with respect to the PSCC operations. In fact, we would like to thank the public for the positive feedback we have received and their patience during this challenging time.

“The Saint John Police continues to provide a lifeline to our community and officers. I am extremely proud of our civilian and uniform members who have dedicated themselves to that mission and have great gratitude to those members of the Saint John Fire Department management team and City of Saint John

managers who have stepped up to assist in keeping our city safe, secure, and healthy.”

Chief R.M. Bruce