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Letter To The Editor

Province Newspaper, March 27, 2010

Subject: "In Our Opinion - Systemic police violence must stop", March 26, 2010

I read your opinion piece on your editorial pages today and was quite disappointed.

While there is no doubt that the images you refer to are troubling and your suggestion that a thorough investigation overseen by the Independent Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner is absolutely necessary and appropriate, your statement that "there is a systemic problem with police violence in the province" goes too far. Your further statement that "it is terrifying and it has to stop" is at best unsupportable and at worst completely misleading and irresponsible.

The fact is that both municipal police officers and the RCMP in this Province respond to more than a million actual calls for service over the course of a year. Conservatively we likely have just as many other contacts with the public that aren't captured by an incident number. Despite these millions of contacts, many of which occur in a negative context, in dynamic and often difficult circumstances, the vast majority of these incidents are resolved with no force at all. In fact more often than not, its the officer who ends up assaulted and injured.

In their most recent annual report (2008) the Independent Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner reported only 481 complaints against all municipal police officers and of those only 12 percent or 57 complaints were substantiated (meaning that on a balance of probabilities there is evidence upon which to substantiate an allegation).

These statistics do not indicate "a systemic problem with police violence in this province". I would suggest the opposite; the statistics instead confirm that our officers conduct themselves professionally as they perform their difficult duties. Which is just what the public expect.

Tom Stamatakis
President
British Columbia Police Association

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