



Mayor Armand Hurford  
Councillor Eric Andersen  
Councillor John French  
Councillor Lauren Greenlaw  
Councillor Andrew Hamilton  
Councillor Chris Pettingill  
Councillor Jenna Stoner

District of Squamish Council  
37955 Second Avenue  
Squamish, BC  
V8B 0A3

***SENT VIA EMAIL***

September 23, 2024

Dear Mayor Hurford and Councillors:

**Re: Excellent Opportunity to Centre Human Rights and Reconciliation in Squamish**

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I am writing to you on behalf of the BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) today to express our unequivocal support for the appeal to you by Squamish community members to ensure the Critical Response Unit<sup>1</sup> (“CRU”) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (“RCMP”) does not operate in your jurisdiction. This letter provides some background about our organization before going into detail as to why we urge you to listen to a delegation appearing before you at Tuesday September 24<sup>th</sup>'s Council meeting and to respond by using your democratic powers to ensure that human rights prevail in your district.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the Critical Response Unit was formerly named the Community-Industry Response Group (“C-IRG”); resources included in this letter may refer to the RCMP unit by their former name.

## **BCCLA, Human Rights and Police Governance**

The BCCLA is the oldest and most active civil liberties and human rights group in Canada. Our mandate is to promote, defend, sustain, and extend civil liberties and human rights in British Columbia and Canada. We are committed to upholding our obligations to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, and to the full realization of the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Given our mandate, we are deeply invested in police accountability matters. We have representation on the provincial body that sets policing standards throughout BC, are frequently consulted about police reform initiatives in BC, participate in relevant Public Inquiries (e.g. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Girls and Women, Mass Casualty Commission, etc.), and frequently appear before public bodies to provide expertise and recommendations about police governance and related democratic issues.

## **Squamish Council's Opportunity to Stand Up for Democracy and Human Rights**

The BCCLA is impressed that members of the Squamish community have organized to appear before your council on Tuesday September 24, 2024 as a delegation to call upon you to ensure that the RCMP serving the District never include any element of the RCMP's CRU.

This is the first time that the BCCLA is aware of that constituents have brought this vital public safety matter to the attention of a local government, providing an opportunity for you to engage in this crucial public policy issue and to use your democratic power to stand up for human rights and civil liberties in Squamish.

## **Squamish can set Objectives, Priorities and Goals that Squamish RCMP Must Follow**

While members of the public tend to assume that local governments have no jurisdiction over how its local police force is configured and operates, especially in the context of RCMP contract policing, this perspective is inaccurate. We assume that Squamish is a signatory to the Municipal Police Unit Agreement given that your district's population is well above the 5,000 threshold required for municipal policing in BC<sup>2</sup> and the media reports that Squamish signed onto an agreement in 2012 to continue to use the RCMP.<sup>3</sup>

This agreement allows for Squamish to direct the operations of the RCMP in Squamish, mostly through the Executive Officer, who is by default the mayor (unless the position has been delegated). It recognizes that although the RCMP is being contracted for policing services,

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<sup>2</sup> Despite [the agreements being public](#), a list of municipalities that have signed on is not publicly available.

<sup>3</sup> Squamish, B.C., agrees to new RCMP contract, bringing final holdout on board (June 29, 2012). Available Online: <https://infotel.ca/newsitem/rcmp-contract/cp19249011>

“nothing in this agreement will be interpreted as limited in any way the obligations of the Municipality pursuant to the Police Act and the Community Charter.”<sup>4</sup> While the agreement contemplates that the management of the municipal police unit remains under the control of Canada, the same is not true for the operation of the municipal police unit: the mayor can set objectives, priorities and goals of the local RCMP unit,<sup>5</sup> and further provides that the RCMP member in charge of the local unit will act under the lawful direction of the municipal CEO (i.e. the mayor).

### **Why Squamish District Must Act to Prohibit CRU from Operating in its Area**

The BCCLA and other organizations invested in human rights and democracy<sup>6</sup> have demanded the immediate abolition of the CRU.

The CRU is a paramilitary operation that was created to stalk, intimidate, and harass land defenders while protecting the private business interests of resource extraction corporations. The CRU deploys internationally condemned abuses of power, including assaulting Indigenous land defenders and their allies, using excessive force and weapons against unarmed Wet’suwet’en People on their unceded traditional territories, and a slew of other activities that bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

A court hearing earlier this year revealed CRU’s use of snipers against citizens and produced audio recordings of CRU officers referring to Indigenous land defenders as “orcs” and “ogres” while laughing and mocking symbols used to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.<sup>7</sup>

The CRU is currently under systemic investigation by the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission (CRCC)<sup>8</sup> following the receipt of over 500 formal complaints of C-IRG misconduct relating to the mandate, policies, guidelines, training, and practices of the unit. Specific complaints relate to the strong anti-Indigenous sentiment and purpose of the specialized RCMP unit, and whether this can be reconciled with Canada’s obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), BC’s Declaration on the Rights of

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<sup>4</sup> Municipal Police Unit Agreement, Article 2.3. Available Online: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/police/publications/agreements/2012-municipal-police-unit.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Article 5.3.

<sup>6</sup> Open Letter to Abolish the RCMP Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG), April 2023. Available online: <https://bccla.org/policy-submission/open-letter-to-abolish-the-rcmp-community-industry-response-group-c-irg/>

<sup>7</sup> Shiri Pasternak, “Why is the RCMP taking civil-liberties advice from pipeline company lawyers?” (February 6, 2024). Available Online: <https://ricochet.media/justice/police-state/industry-on-trial-the-role-of-private-prosecution-in-the-rcmp-abuse-of-wetsuweten-land-defenders/#:~:text=RCMP%20referred%20to%20Indigenous%20women,during%20a%20beating%20they%20inflicted.>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.crcc-ccetp.gc.ca/en/newsroom/crcc-launches-systemic-investigation-rcmp-e-division-community-industry-response-group-cirg>

Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) and calls for justice from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry.

The C-IRG additionally faces multiple lawsuits over misconduct.<sup>9</sup>

Despite a multitude of serious complaints, lawsuits, and an entirely unresolved CRCC investigation, the RCMP has announced the expansion of CRU mandate and activities. This is an appalling and flagrant abuse of state power that flies in the face of rule of law and undermines the principles of a constitutional democracy.

This is why it is imperative for leaders such as yourselves to protect your own community from the CRU.

### **Protecting Squamish from CRU Enhances your District's Strategic Objectives**

This call for your action also supports at least two of the strategic outcomes and objectives that you have committed to for your District.

As the CRU is routinely deployed to crush any dissent related to natural resource use (e.g. deforestation, fossil fuel pipeline construction, etc.), they should not be active in a district committed to be "prepared for the future" by ensuring there is a "livable community for future generations by acting to mitigate climate change and focus on sustainable economic development with fiscal, social and environmental co-benefits."<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, CRU's utter disrespect for First Nations rights, communities and people across BC should compel anyone committed to "continue our work towards genuine Truth and Reconciliation, actively engaging with the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw to foster equitable and trusting relationships"<sup>11</sup> to use their democratic powers to shield the entire community from the CRU.

### **Summary**

You are fortunate to have community members who have brought this crucial public interest issue to your attention so you can use your powers and influence to protect people in your district's population from the inherently discriminatory policing of the CRU unit.

We would be pleased to meet with any or all of you to further explain our concerns about CRU, and to share our thinking and recommendations about how local governments such as yours

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/wet-suwet-en-pipeline-rcmp-cgl-lawsuit-1.6498022>; <https://thetyee.ca/News/2023/02/13/Narwhal-Suing-RCMP/>; <https://www.timescolonist.com/local-news/rcmp-face-proposed-class-action-lawsuit-over-fairy-creek-enforcement-677924>.

<sup>10</sup> District of Squamish Strategic Plan 2023-2026, "4-Prepared for the Future." Available online: <https://squamish.ca/assets/Strategic-Plan/2023-2026-Strategic-Plan-2024-update.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> District of Squamish Strategic Plan 2023-2026, "1-Resilient People and Relationships." Available online: <https://squamish.ca/assets/Strategic-Plan/2023-2026-Strategic-Plan-2024-update.pdf>

can stand up for democracy, human rights and reconciliation with Indigenous nations by ensuring CRU cannot operate within your boundaries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. McDermott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Meghan McDermott

Policy Director