

# Submission of the BC Civil Liberties Association to the Vancouver Police Department

## Input on the VPD's Next Strategic Plan

June 15, 2026

The BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Vancouver Police Department's (VPD) next strategic plan. The BCCLA's recommendations are grounded in human rights (including civil liberties), privacy, police accountability, racial justice, Indigenous rights, and the practical experience of communities most affected by policing. We urge the VPD to use the next plan not as a public relations document, but as an operational accountability framework with measurable commitments, timelines, public reporting, and meaningful consequences when commitments are not met.

The VPD's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan identified "serving the community," "community safety," "community well-being," and "supporting our people" as strategic goals, supported by partnerships, innovation, resourcing, and equity, diversity and inclusion.<sup>1</sup> Those headings can be useful, but only if they are interpreted through a rights-centred lens. Public safety must include freedom from discriminatory policing, unnecessary use of force, unlawful surveillance, and criminalization of poverty, disability, substance use, sex work, youth, and political dissent.

### 1. What is the VPD doing well?

The VPD should retain and expand the practice of publishing policies and procedures online. Ready public access to the Regulations & Procedures Manual is an important baseline for transparency, legality, and accountability.<sup>2</sup> A person should be able to know the rules that govern police conduct before they are stopped, searched, surveilled, excluded from a public-facing space, subjected to force, or otherwise affected by police decisions. In the next plan, this should become an explicit commitment to publish current policies, prior versions, revision histories, plain-language summaries, privacy impact assessments, and implementation updates for significant policy changes.

The VPD should also retain the positive elements of the current plan's consultation model: accessible engagement and stated willingness to adapt the plan as public safety priorities and community needs change.<sup>3</sup> Consultation should not be symbolic. The next plan should set out who was consulted, what was heard, what the VPD changed in response, and what recommendations were rejected and why.

The BCCLA also encourages the VPD to retain the current plan's acknowledgement of the negative impact of the criminal legal system on Indigenous Peoples and other communities, its recognition that reconciliation and decolonization work must continue, and its stated commitments to cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed practice, and bias reduction. These commitments should be made measurable and tied to policies, training, supervision, complaints, discipline, promotion, and data publication.

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<sup>1</sup> Vancouver Police Department, 2022–2026 Strategic Plan. URL: <https://vpd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022-2026-vpd-strategic-plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Vancouver Police Department, Regulations & Procedures Manual (effective February 12, 2026). URL: <https://vpd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/regulations-and-procedures-manual.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Supra*, note 1.

Finally, the VPD's publication of some completed Freedom of Information responses is a positive practice that should be retained and expanded.<sup>4</sup> The next plan should commit to an accessible public disclosure library modelled on proactive disclosure best practices: all general-interest FOI disclosure packages should be listed in a searchable index, with a simple pathway for any member of the public to obtain the same package without having to duplicate an FOI request.

## 2. What can the VPD do better?

### A. Serving the community: make transparency, accountability, and community trust operational commitments

The next plan should commit to routine public reporting on police powers that have the greatest potential to infringe rights. This should include disaggregated data on use of force, street checks or street-check-like encounters, searches, arrests, handcuffing, police dog deployments, less-lethal weapons, strip searches, mental health apprehensions, protest policing, surveillance deployments, school-based policing, and all programs in which police act with or on behalf of private entities. Data should be disaggregated where legally and ethically appropriate, including by race, Indigeneity, age, gender, disability, geography, and outcome. BCCLA's recent submission on transparency and trust emphasized that impacted families and members of the public must be meaningfully included in identifying policing priorities and recommendations addressing systemic issues.<sup>5</sup>

The VPD should publish misconduct findings and complaint outcomes in a manner that is accessible, searchable, and privacy-protective. Public confidence depends not only on rules existing, but on the public being able to understand whether those rules are followed. The next plan should also require the VPD to explain how recommendations from the OPCC, IIO, coroner's inquests, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, courts, privacy regulators, and community-led reports have been incorporated into policy and training, or why they have not.

The VPD should also publish information about the public resources used for participation by the Chief Constable and other VPD representatives in policing associations and policy-making bodies, including the BC Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Where public funds and staff time support advocacy, submissions, agendas, conferences, or committee work that influence policing policy, the public should be able to see the costs, positions advanced, materials submitted, and policy outcomes. This is particularly important where policing associations influence law reform in areas that directly affect Charter rights, privacy, surveillance, criminalization, and protest.

The VPD should commit to political neutrality in public communications. Police communications should be fact-based, operationally necessary, accurate, non-stigmatizing, and respectful of the presumption of innocence. The VPD should avoid commentary that ridicules journalists, minimizes serious rights concerns, characterizes public legal education as hostile to police, or aligns the institution with partisan or geopolitical positions.

The next plan should include a clear commitment that policies published to the public mean what they say and will not be interpreted internally in ways that defeat their ordinary meaning. This is

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<sup>4</sup> Vancouver Police Department, Published Freedom of Information Requests. URL: <https://vpd.ca/about-the-vpd/published-freedom-of-information-requests/>

<sup>5</sup> BC Civil Liberties Association, Submission re RCMP Transparency and Trust Multi-Stakeholder Forum Strategic Plan. URL: <https://bccla.org/policy-submission/re-bcclas-submission-draft-rcmps-transparency-and-trust-multi-stakeholderforum-strategic-plan/>

especially important for surveillance and protest policing. BCCLA and Pivot have raised serious concerns about VPD surveillance of Palestine solidarity protests, including concerns that surveillance practices violated VPD policies, infringed free expression, and reflected discriminatory policing.<sup>6</sup> The next plan should require advance public disclosure of surveillance authorities, technologies, data flows, retention periods, data-sharing partners, and complaint pathways, subject only to narrow and justified operational limits.

## **B. Community safety: end programs that lack evidence, legal clarity, or rights safeguards**

The VPD should terminate its partnership with the Vancouver School Board to provide School Liaison Officers. BCCLA and other human rights organizations have called for an end to police-in-school programs across BC, citing the harms and risks experienced by Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+, low-income, migrant, and otherwise marginalized students, as well as the absence of compelling evidence that these programs meet their stated safety objectives.<sup>7</sup> Youth safety is not advanced by normalizing police presence in learning environments, collecting student information, escalating school discipline into police contact, or placing students who already face discrimination under additional surveillance.

If the VPD believes any school-based police function is necessary, it should first publish an independent human rights impact assessment, disaggregated data, evidence of effectiveness, privacy impact assessment, complaint data, use-of-force data, and a meaningful consultation report from affected students and families.

The VPD should also end Bar Watch, Restaurant Watch, and other “inadmissible patron” or trespass-based partnership programs unless and until they are placed on a clear statutory footing, independently reviewed, and redesigned with rights safeguards. BCCLA and other members of civil society have raised concerns that trespass-based programs create conflicts of interest when police act as agents for private property owners, lack adequate public consultation and policy transparency, and raise serious concerns about police collection of personal information.<sup>8</sup> The OPCC has also recorded concerns about Bar Watch/Restaurant Watch, including the need to examine the legal validity of the programs, disclosure of police database information to participating establishments, and the subjectivity involved in removal from “inadmissible patron” status.<sup>9</sup>

At minimum, the VPD should publish the legal authority for these programs, all memoranda of understanding or template agreements, criteria for placing someone on a list, the evidence required, retention periods, who can access information, whether police databases are queried or disclosed, whether video or ID scans are accessed by police, and a fair, accessible, time-limited procedure for notice, reasons, review, correction, and removal. People should not be secretly blacklisted from public-facing venues through opaque arrangements between police and private establishments.

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<sup>6</sup> BC Civil Liberties Association and Pivot Legal Society, Vancouver Police Board handling of surveillance complaint raises oversight concerns. URL: <https://bccla.org/2025/09/press-release-vancouver-police-board-handling-of-surveillance-complaint-raises-oversight-concerns/>

<sup>7</sup> BC Civil Liberties Association et al., Human rights groups urge moratorium on police in schools in BC. URL: <https://bccla.org/policy-submission/human-rights-groups-urge-moratorium-on-police-in-schools-in-bc/>

<sup>8</sup> Pivot Legal Society and BC Civil Liberties Association, joint complaint regarding trespass prevention/private property programs. URL: [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/pivotlegal/pages/3582/attachments/original/1623721580/2021-06-15\\_Joint\\_TPP\\_Complaint\\_Final.pdf](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/pivotlegal/pages/3582/attachments/original/1623721580/2021-06-15_Joint_TPP_Complaint_Final.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, Annual Report 2018/2019, discussion of Bar Watch/Restaurant Watch concerns. URL: <https://opcc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/OPCC-2018-2019-Annual-Report.pdf>

### C. Community well-being: stop using police as the default response to social need

The current plan appropriately recognizes that mental health, substance use, sex work, homelessness, protests, and road safety affect community well-being. However, the next plan should make clear that the leading role for mental health, substance use, homelessness, sex work, and youth well-being should rest with health, housing, Indigenous, peer-led, and community-based services rather than police enforcement. BCCLA has repeatedly urged a shift away from criminalizing and stigmatizing mental health responses that default to police, and toward upstream supports, mental health services, and civilian and community-led crisis teams.<sup>10</sup>

On drug policy, the VPD should retain the current plan's support for harm reduction, safe supply, opioid agonist therapies, treatment on demand, and decriminalization of personal possession, but strengthen it. The next plan should support full decriminalization and non-coercive services, while explicitly opposing police-led or police-referred treatment models that make health care contingent on enforcement contact. BCCLA has called for decriminalization of all drug possession for personal use and the redistribution of resources away from harmful drug-law enforcement and toward voluntary programs and services that protect health and human rights.<sup>11</sup> In 2024, BCCLA co-developed and endorsed ***To End a Crisis: A Vision for BC Drug Policy***, a roadmap centred on drug regulation, decriminalization, addressing inequality, and detox, recovery, and treatment.<sup>12</sup>

For homelessness, encampments, sex work, poverty, and street disorder, the next plan should expressly reject displacement, confiscation, harassment, and surveillance as measures of success. The VPD should instead measure whether police contact is reduced, whether people are connected to voluntary supports, and whether people living in public space experience less harm. Public safety cannot be achieved by treating visible poverty as a police problem.

For protest and dissent, the VPD's priority should be to facilitate the safe exercise of Charter-protected freedoms of expression and assembly, not to chill, surveil, or suppress it. The next plan should require a protest policing policy that is viewpoint-neutral, anti-racist, privacy-protective, and publicly accessible. It should prohibit unnecessary surveillance of protesters, require clear records of any intelligence-sharing, and ensure that police do not treat refusal to pre-coordinate with police as evidence of bad faith or heightened risk. The VPD should liaise with legal advocates, including BCCLA, without defensiveness or contempt for rights education.<sup>13</sup>

### D. Supporting our people: train, supervise, and intervene to prevent rights violations

The current plan's focus on employee health, wellness, training, equitable workplaces, and an early warning intervention system should be retained. However, these commitments should be linked to public safety outcomes and accountability. An early warning system should identify patterns in complaints, use of force, racial disparities, improper searches, protest deployments, missing person investigations, and interactions with people in crisis. It should trigger supervision, retraining, removal from high-risk duties where needed, and public reporting.

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<sup>10</sup> BC Civil Liberties Association, Submission to the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act (April 2021). URL: <https://bccla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/BCCLA-Submission-to-Special-Committee-on-Reforming-the-Police-Act-April-2021.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> BC Civil Liberties Association, Submission to British Columbia's Select Standing Committee on Health. URL: <https://bccla.org/policy-submission/policy-submission-to-british-columbias-select-standing-committee-on-health/>

<sup>12</sup> BC Civil Liberties Association, From Decriminalization to Recriminalization in BC Drug Policy / To End a Crisis: Vision for BC Drug Policy. URL: <https://bccla.org/2024/11/from-decriminalization-to-recriminalization-in-bc-drug-policy/>

<sup>13</sup> VPD Response provided to Vancouver Police Board in the Final Report regarding Service and Policy Complaint OPCC File #2024-26602- Board File #2024-022. URL: [https://vancouverpoliceboard.ca/policy/policeboard/agenda/2025/0619/2025-06-17\\_COMBINED-S-or-P-Board-Meeting-Package-of-June-19-2025.x90455.pdf](https://vancouverpoliceboard.ca/policy/policeboard/agenda/2025/0619/2025-06-17_COMBINED-S-or-P-Board-Meeting-Package-of-June-19-2025.x90455.pdf) at 82-83.

The VPD should require all members, supervisors, communications staff, analysts, and leadership to receive regular training on the VPD's history and the reasons some communities distrust police. This includes the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, Pickton-related failures, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the over-policing of Indigenous, Black, racialized, poor, unhoused, sex-working, drug-using, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and the lived experience of people who face multiple forms of vulnerability. The Missing Women Commission's final report and the National Inquiry's final report must be treated as core policing materials, not optional historical background.

Recent events underscore that this training must be practical and operational. In the IIO's public report on the death of Ojibway father of 8 Christopher Amyotte, civilian witnesses described a person in distress who appeared to have been bear-sprayed, while some officers interpreted him through frames of drug psychosis or "excited delirium"; the report also notes that bystanders were yelling that he had been pepper-sprayed.<sup>14</sup> The next plan should require scenario-based training on recognizing medical distress, listening to bystanders, de-escalation, containment, and using emergency health responses before force.

The VPD must eliminate "excited delirium" from training, policies, informal culture, communications, and use-of-force rationales. Physicians for Human Rights has concluded that "excited delirium" is not a valid independent medical or psychiatric diagnosis and has no clear definition or pathophysiology.<sup>15</sup> Peer-reviewed medical literature describes how the concept has been used to explain deaths in custody while minimizing the role of restraint and force.<sup>16</sup> The American College of Medical Toxicology has also called for discontinuing the term, noting that it is not recognized by the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases or DSM-5 as a formal diagnosis and is associated with racism.<sup>17</sup> The VPD should train members to describe observable behaviour and medical needs without invoking discredited ideas and associated language.

### 3. What should be the VPD's main policing priorities in the next five years?

The next strategic plan should move away from measuring success primarily through police visibility, enforcement outputs, or the aspiration to be "the safest major city in Canada." Safety must include the safety of people who are harmed by police contact, including Indigenous people, Black people, racialized people, people who use drugs, people in mental health crisis, unhoused people, sex workers, migrants, youth, disabled people, and people exercising protest rights.

The BCCLA recommends the following priorities for the next five years:

- **Rights-centred accountability:** Publish use-of-force, stop, search, arrest, protest, surveillance, misconduct, and complaint data; publish implementation reports on external recommendations; and ensure that the public can understand the legal authority for police programs.
- **Non-police responses to social need:** Support civilian, health, Indigenous, peer-led, and community-led responses to mental health crisis and response, substance use, homelessness, sex work, and youth well-being, with the goal of reducing police contact.

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<sup>14</sup> Independent Investigations Office of BC, Public Report of Death of Christopher Amyotte (IIO file 2022-227). URL: <https://iiobc.ca/app/uploads/sites/472/2022/08/August-22-2022-Vancouver-Death-2022-227.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Physicians for Human Rights, "Excited Delirium" and Deaths in Police Custody: The Deadly Impact of a Baseless Diagnosis. URL: <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/excited-delirium/>

<sup>16</sup> Krista A. McGuinness et al., Excited Delirium: A Systematic Review, *Academic Forensic Pathology* (2022). URL: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9280280/>

<sup>17</sup> American College of Medical Toxicology, Position Statement: End the Use of the Term "Excited Delirium." URL: [https://www.acmt.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PS\\_230501\\_End-the-Use-of-the-Term-Excited-Delirium.pdf](https://www.acmt.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PS_230501_End-the-Use-of-the-Term-Excited-Delirium.pdf)

- **Decriminalization and harm reduction:** Support safe supply, voluntary treatment, overdose prevention, opioid agonist therapies, full decriminalization, and the redirection of resources from drug-law enforcement to health, housing, income, and peer-led supports.
- **Protest rights and privacy:** Facilitate safe protest without viewpoint discrimination, unnecessary surveillance, or stigmatizing communications; publish clear rules for any surveillance technology and data-sharing.
- **Ending harmful partnerships:** Terminate the SLO program and end or suspend Bar Watch, Restaurant Watch, and similar private-property exclusion programs unless clear legal authority, evidence, and rights safeguards are established.
- **Anti-racism, decolonization, and missing-persons accountability:** Make MMIWG, Pickton-related failures, racial profiling, disability justice, trauma-informed practice, and cultural safety mandatory operational training tied to supervision, discipline, and promotion.
- **Evidence-based resource allocation:** Evaluate every program against independent evidence, human rights impacts, privacy risks, opportunity costs, and whether non-police alternatives would better serve the community.

The next strategic plan should be more accountable than the current plan. It should distinguish between what the VPD will do, what it will stop doing, what it will support others to do instead, how progress will be measured, and how the public will verify compliance.

Retaining the current plan's commitments to consultation, accountability, reconciliation, harm reduction, trauma-informed practice, public information, and employee wellness is important. But the next plan must go further: it must treat civil liberties, human rights, privacy, and freedom from discriminatory policing as central measures of public safety.