

Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities

Minister's Statement in the Legislature

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about an issue that is important to all Nova Scotians. Crime and its effects are a growing concern across Canada and Nova Scotia. In particular, we are increasingly dismayed by reports of street crime, particularly the behaviour of a small number of out of control youth. At the same time, communities are also experiencing the negative impacts of illegal drugs, especially in schools, and the resulting incidents of property crimes and theft.

We know that there are many government services and many excellent community programs addressing these issues. At the same time, tackling these immense problems can be overwhelming. It truly takes a coordinated effort, uniting many voices and incorporating the ideas of both experts and laypeople.

To that end, today I am announcing the creation of a Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities. The goal of the Task Force is to look at community programs, government services, legislation and policing best practices across Nova Scotia and in other jurisdictions to identify and promote programs and actions that are making a positive impact in communities. For example, we know that the Cape Breton Regional Police have a very successful officers in schools program, just one example of the many excellent initiatives across the province.

Many government departments, municipalities, police agencies and organizations across the province are actively engaged in promoting community safety and development. The Task Force will identify ways to support communities in their efforts to make improvements, and to address situations that have a negative impact on their neighbourhoods. The end result will be a provincial crime prevention strategy developed through community consultation and locally driven crime prevention action plans.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that strong and safe communities result from a mix of social, economic and enforcement factors. Last week we announced significant legislation that will help

both law enforcement and communities fight crime in our province. And in this week's budget we invested significantly in enforcement activities. However we know that the seeds of criminal behaviour often take root long before the actual crime occurs. Police have told us that law enforcement alone cannot address crime in our province. Therefore our efforts are taking a two pronged approach: significant and serious enforcement, coupled with programs that address the root causes of crime.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked with other government departments, police, and the Child and Youth Action Committee. Through this task force we will add the voices of all Nova Scotians who are concerned about the cause and effects of crime on our communities. We will seek their ideas, we will offer information, and together we will develop solutions that have their roots in those communities.

Over the coming months, we will invite the cooperation and assistance of other parties, such as community leaders, law enforcement, counselors, school officials, and others. Our goal is to take this input, along with a review of successful programs and legislation in other jurisdictions, to consider how we can compliment and enhance our existing programs.

Mr. Speaker, our seniors should feel safe in their neighbourhoods, even after dark. Our students should not have to face the pressures of drugs in our schools. And all Nova Scotians should feel confident that their province is a safe place to live. The Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities will compliment the existing efforts of all partners, and will help address current concerns while charting a course to prevent crime in the future.

Thank you.