



The Alberta Advantage

Leveraging the strength of the RCMP

SYNDICAT DES EMPLOYÉ-E-S DE LA SÉCURITÉ ET DE LA JUSTICE

USJE  **SESJ**

UNION OF SAFETY AND JUSTICE EMPLOYEES

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On April 7, 2025, Alberta's Public Safety and Emergency Services Minister Mike Ellis tabled Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, which established the framework for the creation of a new Provincial Police Force. This force would, if municipalities choose to use it, potentially replace the role that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) plays in many communities across the province. The Bill received Royal Assent on May 15 of this year.

On July 2, the Government of Alberta formally launched its service, the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, and announced its first chief, Calgary's former deputy police chief, Sat Parhar.



Vast majority of Albertans are behind the RCMP

The Union of Safety and Justice Employees represents approximately 8,000 federal public service employees (federal public safety personnel) in the RCMP.

875 of them proudly work in small and large communities in Alberta.

These include Detachment Services Assistants who work at every Detachment in Alberta and thousands of others who work at regional headquarters in Edmonton and throughout the country. These individuals:

- support complex criminal investigations
- coordinate emergency response efforts
- undertake crucial data analysis and oversee Canada's sex offender registries and monitor illegal child pornography activity;
- work in forensic labs and cybercrime units.

According to an independent survey of Albertans commissioned by the National Police Federation released this fall (2025):

- 76 percent of Albertans in RCMP-served areas are satisfied with their policing.
- 71 percent say the public has not been properly consulted about replacing the RCMP.

A service for Albertans

Under the Provincial Police Service Agreement (PPSA), Alberta's Public Safety Minister controls officer numbers and policing priorities—not Ottawa.

Further, the federal government is not ending contract policing. The RCMP remains a reliable, long-term solution for policing in Alberta. Contract policing arrangements are in force until 2032 and the current Carney government has made NO signal that they wish to sever ties with the RCMP in Alberta.

In fact, more investments have been announced in the RCMP with the goal of enhancing skills and knowledge, modernizing its training facilities with more infrastructure allowing greater inclusion of remote learners, and participation from off-site subject matter resources. As part of a comprehensive border security package, the RCMP will advance its Border Integrity program, and the RCMP is expanding partnerships, capacity, and submissions to the Canadian Integrated Ballistics Identification Network.

Value for Dollar

Studies continue to highlight that the RCMP remains the most cost-effective option for the overwhelming majority of smaller communities in Alberta—when compared to four different policing models, including an Alberta Provincial Service.

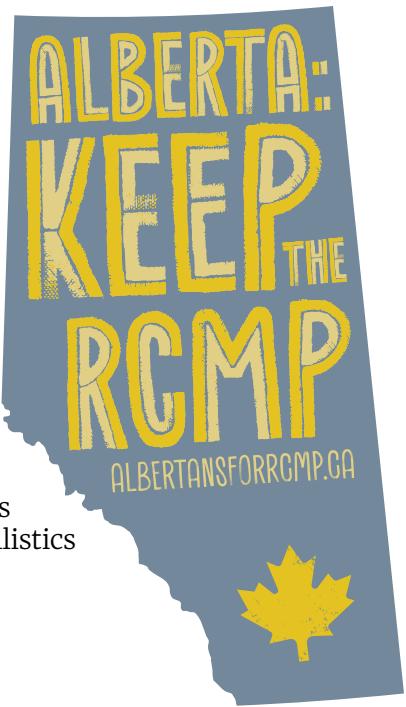
In 2021, the government's own report estimated \$372 million in start-up costs and an additional \$164 million more in annual operating costs for a provincial police service. Those numbers are likely to have escalated given inflation and a major shift in the province's fiscal reality.

Independent municipal reviews across the province have highlighted that **replacing the RCMP would increase costs, reduce service levels, and destabilize rural and small-town policing.**

This was noted in a recent report conducted by Western Management Consultants (WMC) for the Township of Rocky Mountain who said at a recent council meeting on August 5, 2025 that:

“The cost of the RCMP compared to other options remains the municipality’s ‘best deal’ because as a smaller municipality, it lacks forces and “economies of scale. The RCMP contract optimization and oversight can provide you with short-term gains and prepare you better for the future.”

“Maintaining the RCMP contract provides stability within a known framework and leverages existing investments, avoiding the significant one-time transition costs, operational complexities, and inherent uncertainties associated with establishing new policing entities.”



Risks of severing ties with the RCMP

Diverting resources from other public priorities

The transition away from the RCMP, which has very well-established infrastructure and systems to support policing operations at the provincial and national levels, would be extremely time-consuming and resource intensive.

Compromising the \$180 million annual subsidy provided by the federal government for local policing in Alberta

This subsidy has been part of the Government of Canada's long-standing support of local policing within provinces and territories still using the RCMP. It is very unlikely that this subsidy would continue if the RCMP were not being utilized for local needs.

Intense competition for trained police officers

The Calgary Police Service, among others, have recently reported significant drops in applications due to decreasing interest in the field and competition from other law enforcement branches. Establishing a whole new Police Force will only add to existing recruitment and retention challenges in the province.

The benefits of scale

By virtue of being a national police force, the RCMP can scale up quickly in emergencies, and bring the entire country's resources to bear in any community, something a standalone provincial service simply can't match.

In 2016, when the now infamous wildfires in Fort McMurray forced 88,000 to leave their homes, RCMP officers and non-uniformed staff rallied immediately to assist emergency responders and those requiring evacuation. The RCMP was central to this response and brought provincial and national strength to the job.



Investments now will be felt immediately

The National Police Federation has been clear. Instead of spending hundreds of millions on a second police service, immediate investments in the RCMP today would mean:

- More uniformed officers on the ground now;
- Modern equipment and technology;
- Enhancements to service delivery.



An Alberta police force risks losing so much expertise from local RCMP detachments

Calgary Herald | April 11, 2022 | By Valda Behrens, Regional Vice President, USJE



In so many ways, Alberta feels like it's at a crossroads. The intense focus on Premier Jason Kenney's leadership is generating many different reactions. We are nothing if not a passionate, fiercely independent province that does things its own way. That is likely why Kenney believes the establishment of a made-in-Alberta police force would be a positive direction.

As a proud Albertan, I am definitely torn. My husband and I have worked hard to raise four kids who now have their own children. As a middle-class family, we stretched every dollar.

When we moved to High River in search of a more affordable community, I started working with the RCMP as a Detachment Services assistant and then supervisor shortly thereafter. I quickly came to see how hard my fellow Albertans work—day in and day out—to protect public safety, oversee the prosecution of major crimes and train staff. These folks are deeply woven into the fabric of our communities.

I also lived this first-hand in 2016 when the now infamous wildfires in Fort McMurray forced 88,000 to leave their homes. RCMP officers and non-uniformed staff rallied to assist emergency responders and those requiring evacuation. I was honoured to contribute, leaving my kids and husband for over a week.

It wasn't the first time. When catastrophic floods struck my hometown in High River in 2013, I was again called to duty as an RCMP non-uniformed employee. As my own family made it to safety, I worked 24/7 alongside uniformed personnel to co-ordinate rescue efforts and keep law and order.

Thirteen thousand people were evacuated; 150 had to be rescued. Remarkably, nearly 440 Canadian Forces and RCMP members worked alongside hundreds of non-uniformed staff and volunteers.

What I learned during these crises is how crucial it is to have a seasoned, versatile police force that can respond quickly, and draw on additional expertise and personnel. In Alberta, there are 114 RCMP detachments in every corner of our province.

While Calgary and Edmonton have their own police forces, elsewhere in Alberta, it is overwhelmingly the RCMP that responds to emergencies and lays charges for major crimes like human trafficking, child pornography and the illicit drug trade, among others.

Uniformed officers are backed up by hundreds of dedicated operational staff that support crucial investigations in Alberta, including evidence.

In Kenney's transition plan, the retention of non-uniformed personnel who are the backbone of Alberta's public safety network is hardly mentioned, despite their decades of experience in criminal justice.

Would these folks be retained by a provincial police force? Do they even want to go? Many consider themselves part of the RCMP family. The potential loss of so much expertise and knowledge keeps me up at night.

So does the challenge of recruiting a whole new force. In Surrey, which severed its ties with the RCMP, the competition for seasoned uniformed officers remains intense. Replacing thousands of Mounties in Alberta is no small feat, full stop.

In my opinion, the expense and logistics of this transition are not likely to save Alberta money, and the real cost to communities served by the RCMP is far higher than any report could capture.

Ultimately, I am a mother, wife and proud resident of High River. My priority is the safety and well-being of Albertans. I didn't plan to work with the RCMP 15 years ago, but I got the chance to serve as a valued member of the operational backbone. In the process, I learned an immense amount about public safety in the process.

I urge my fellow Albertans to think carefully about the perils of a hasty decision that could severely jeopardize our province, not make it better.

Valda Behrens worked with the High River RCMP detachment for 15 years, and now supports non-uniformed RCMP personnel with the Canada-wide Union of Safety and Justice Employees.

Provincial police force isn't the answer to organized crime or addictions in Alberta

Edmonton Journal | November 17, 2022 | By Zef Ordman, Regional Vice President, USJE

Last week, Premier Danielle Smith announced in her mandate letters to cabinet members that she is likely forging ahead with the establishment of a provincial police force. During her leadership campaign, Smith endorsed her predecessor's preoccupation with having a "made-in-Alberta" police force to respond to rural and urban crime.

In a city like Red Deer, which has been long served by a large RCMP detachment, this latest move hardly comes as good news. I was born and raised in Red Deer, and returned to raise a family here. I work in federal corrections, previously as a guard and, more recently, as a federal parole officer.

In this role, I have interacted with hundreds of federal offenders who are serving time for major crimes. Consequently, I've learned more than I ever expected about the justice system and policing agencies in this province. Albertans should certainly expect top-notch policing, no matter who is providing it. And when something goes wrong, the police need to be there to protect us.

Alberta's police forces also need to be held accountable so that they provide a high level of service and keep our communities safe. From what I have seen, supplementing the role of the RCMP with a more localized provincial police force, or replacing the RCMP altogether, would not reap the benefits one might think in much of Alberta, urban or rural.

Having spent thousands of hours up close with federal offenders in an effort to break the cycle of crime, a very high percentage of inmates are contending with deeply entrenched substance abuse and addictions issues. Inside and outside of federal penitentiaries, gangs have a major role to play in fostering those addictions and the illicit drug trade in general, courtesy of sophisticated organized-crime groups who work across borders to fuel well-oiled distribution networks.

To have any chance of disrupting these networks, and addictions overall, we need specialized policing agencies that are national and international in scope, and have the resources and tools to stop them in their tracks. Highly localized policing is not the answer to this challenge, but rather more robust criminal investigations led by the RCMP and urban police agencies in Edmonton and Calgary and beyond.

The task force on provincial policing also talks about using multi-disciplinary teams specializing in mental health and addictions. This is totally achievable with-



in the existing model of 114 RCMP detachments that are well-established and staffed by not just Mounties but mostly non-uniformed locals that know their communities and the people who reside in them very well.

At the end of the day, I echo the strong desire on the part of many Albertans to have more proactive policing. But a costly transition to a provincial force which can't deliver the goods is not my version of fiscal prudence. As a Conservative, I see better ways to use my tax dollars and protect my family.

The reality is that no matter the force, policing is both very labour-intensive and increasingly relies on sophisticated technology and equipment. RCMP detachments in rural, remote and even urban areas would, no doubt, benefit from having more boots on the ground and partnerships with community agencies to equip them for today's realities.

Overwhelmingly, the RCMP in Alberta is staffed by Albertans, which includes the hundreds of non-uniformed RCMP employees who support the operational backbone of the force, including high-stakes investigations into child exploitation, fraud, gang violence, and related crimes. This includes right here in the Red Deer detachment.

It's crucial that our elected leaders have a candid conversation, not play politics, with Albertans about how to strengthen the police forces we already have, including the RCMP, which has had a major foothold in Alberta for over 100 years.

Zef Ordman is a regional vice-president with the Union of Safety and Justice Employees (USJE) representing hundreds of federal correctional employees (including parole and programs) working in federal prisons in Alberta. He was a federal parole officer and correctional guard for a number of years.



Learn more about the Albertans working for the RCMP

The Union of Safety and Justice Employees has developed a website focused on featuring the voices of Albertans and Canadians working for the RCMP

www.servingtogether.ca



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