



ALBERTA
JUSTICE AND SOLICITOR GENERAL

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Calgary-Acadia*

May 26, 2022

His Worship Amarjeet Sohi
Mayor
City of Edmonton
2nd Floor, City Hall
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton AB T5J 2R7

Dear Mayor Sohi:

I am writing to you about the extremely concerning and unacceptable levels of crime in Edmonton's downtown core and on the city's transit systems.

Statistics from the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) show a sharp increase of more than 11 per cent in the number of violent crimes in the downtown area, from 2,382 in 2020 up to 2,665 last year. The most recent violent crime resulting in the deaths of two men, on May 18, 2022 in Chinatown. The numbers also show the severity of crime at Edmonton's light rapid transit (LRT) system and transit centres grew by nearly 60 per cent last year. Further data shows a 341 per cent increase in reported medical incidents on transit from 2019 to 2021.

So far this year, it is reported that the EPS has recorded 549 LRT and transit centre disturbances, including 130 violent incidents and 42 weapons complaints. As you are no doubt aware, in late April, a senior was pushed onto the tracks at the Health Sciences Jubilee station. In early March, a 39-year-old man was injured in a stabbing during an altercation at the Central station. Recently, on May 18, a woman was stabbed and a man was injured at the Bay/Enterprise Square station. While unhygienic and garbage-strewn conditions remain all too common, it is the drug use and aggressive encounters that are the more significant safety concerns.

As the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, I have a responsibility under the *Police Act* to ensure the people of Edmonton receive adequate and effective policing. It is quite apparent that residents feel uncomfortable and unsafe in the downtown core, riding transit, and traversing the transit centre corridors. Some say it is simply too dangerous to use the LRT system or to go downtown. A simple walk through transit corridors is often met with open drug use and irrational behaviour of many who use these locations to loiter for extended periods of time. A real and perceived threat exists for the many commuters who rely upon public transportation to support their livelihood.

For its part, the Alberta government has provided much-needed financial support to cash-strapped municipal transit systems hit hard during the pandemic. Alberta is committing \$79.5 million, which is being matched by the federal government, for a total of almost \$159 million to support 26 Alberta municipalities. Edmonton's transit system will receive almost \$66.9 million. In terms of funding for policing, Edmonton received a policing support grant of \$26 million for 2021/22 to help keep the city safe and strong.

The Government of Alberta also supports a wide variety of initiatives to target the root causes of crime and social issues. This is designed to take pressure off the police and move towards more appropriate effective solutions and management of the issues. Examples of these initiatives include, but are not limited to:

- Police and crisis teams,
- Victims services programs, and
- Drug treatment courts.

Alberta's government is helping Albertans access life-saving addiction and mental health-related prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery resources. To that extent, the Alberta government is treating addiction as a healthcare issue while keeping communities safe. Significant investments have been made in the Edmonton region with a new 100 bed treatment centre to support Edmonton, adding hundreds of additionally funded treatment spaces in Edmonton, removing user fees from all publicly funded addiction treatment centres, exploring opportunities to expand access to overdose prevention services where appropriate, providing direct funding of \$600,000 for Edmonton Police Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership (HELP) teams, providing opioid medication treatment on demand through Alberta's Virtual Opioid Dependency Program (VODP) with no wait list and no cost, and supporting police to offer anyone who is arrested for any reason immediate access to evidence-based opioid addiction treatment.

Alberta's government is committed to supporting homelessness in Edmonton. That's why Homeward Trust Edmonton, will receive over \$29 million to provide funding to local organizations to deliver 55 programs, including funding to operate more than 400 supportive housing units, which includes the new supportive housing units opening this year. This year, Community and Social Services will also provide more than \$11 million to homeless shelter providers in Edmonton to operate 629 emergency shelter beds and 310 short-term/long-term supportive housing. We also announced a homelessness task force Co-Chaired by Edmonton Police Chief Dale McFee and includes City Manager Andre Corbould to look at the issue of minimum standards of care within the shelter system and a better-coordinated community response. In Edmonton we have provided \$4 million to Hope Mission to redevelop the Herb Jamieson Centre emergency shelter, which is now open with 400 shelter spaces to accommodate Albertans experiencing homelessness. During Covid, shelters across the province were provided \$73 million in April of 2020, and 21.5 million in November 2021 to help with COVID. This is over \$100 million in addition to annual funding.

In short, the people of Edmonton deserve better than what this city council is delivering. They deserve to be able to ride transit, visit restaurants, attend events, and browse through stores in a safe and welcoming environment. Public safety should be your priority, like it is mine.

As such, section 30(1) of the *Police Act* states that when a municipality responsible for providing and maintaining policing services is not (a) providing or maintaining adequate and effective policing services, or (b) complying with the Act or the regulations, the Minister may request the council to take the action the Minister considers necessary to correct the situation.

At this time, I am requesting you take direct action to address this alarming situation. Within the next two weeks, I will require a public safety plan from you that will increase police response to this disorder and ensure members of the public can use Edmonton's public transit safely. I look forward to reviewing this plan soon.

Sincerely,

Original signed by:

Honourable Tyler Shandro, QC
Minister of Justice and Solicitor General