

**Letters to the Editor**  
**The Globe and Mail**

January 8, 2011

**Re: "What's the price for law and order?"**

The theme of this article, that police wages are the main drivers behind rising policing costs, is simplistic and lacking in context because it does not tell "the story behind the story", which is much more complex.

It is easy to point to rising salaries and compensation, but more difficult to focus on the real issues, not all of which are driven by police unions. What are the drivers of policing costs; including salaries? Among the many, they include publicly-mandated requirements for more and better training and education and are accompanied by higher standards and greater expectations. These are positive things, but they do not come without added costs.

The ever-increasing and quite appropriate requirements for transparency and accountability do not come cheaply either; incident reporting, note-taking, and detailed documentation all take time, and it is obvious that a police officer cannot be conducting on-the-street policing while at the same time fulfilling these reporting functions.

The saying that "time is money" happens to be true, and a 2008 study done by the Vancouver Police Department revealed that up to 49 per cent of policing time "on the street" can involve police officers dealing with people who have mental health issues. Unfortunately, policing seems to have become the de facto 24/7 social agency of last resort.

A serious debate should indeed be held, about both policing costs and policing duties. Police officers, generally speaking, are not trained to be mental health workers, nor family and/or addictions counsellors, yet these are the roles in which they often find themselves.

It is also worth noting that the Vancouver Police Union has supported "civilianization" of some historical police functions, where appropriate. For example, by-law officers, court officers, communications functions, jail guards, property office staff, front desk staff are all jobs that used to be carried out by police officers and are now performed by civilians or by special constables with less than complete police training. Notwithstanding these changes, all of these services also drive policing costs.

Finally, no debate or discussion about compensation or policing costs would be complete without recognizing the significant revenues policing activities generate for those same municipalities that are concerned about the cost of policing. I am referring here to speeding and parking tickets, permit and licensing fees, and other third party payments, of course. Interestingly those revenues are often allocated to general revenues and used to support other programs or services; not policing.

My members, and I am sure most police officers across the country, would be pleased if we could stick to our core functions of enforcing laws, investigating crime and protecting the public.

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