

B.C. GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE EMPLOYEES' UNION

Expanding Sheriff Duties to Include Routine Traffic Responsibilities: Union's Lobby Efforts on Track

VANCOUVER, Sept. 7 /CNW/ - The BCGEU lobbying efforts to push for an expansion of sheriff duties to include routine traffic responsibilities appear to be bearing fruit. In a recent media interview Attorney General Mike de Jong gave the go ahead to start a pilot project that will include a small number of BCGEU Component 1 deputy sheriffs doing routine traffic duties in the province.

"We have supported the government with this ever since we first presented the idea in 2007. We are pleased to learn the attorney general has decided to go ahead with a pilot project," said Dean Purdy, chair of the BCGEU's Corrections & Sheriff Services Component.

In 2007, the union met with former Attorney General Wally Oppal and pitched the idea of expanding the mandate of sheriffs' duties to include routine traffic duties. In 2009, the BCGEU put forward its proposal repeatedly to current Attorney General Mike de Jong. This would take the pressure off police forces and make additional officers available, we argued. This initiative includes moving responsibility for some routine police duties, such as traffic patrol, in order to free up police officers for more serious criminal investigations, such as gang task force and drug crimes.

"BC sheriffs have been underutilized for many years. This is about improving road safety for all British Columbians and working to provide additional resources to police forces. We see this as a win-win for both the BC sheriffs and the police. It makes complete sense from a safety standpoint on how resources are utilized," said Purdy.

"We've been hearing from the public for months now that they want to see the police concentrating on more serious crimes. It has been proven that by putting additional resources on the road and focusing more resources in this area, we will improve safety on the roads for all British Columbians," Purdy added.

Alberta moved to the new sheriff model in 2006. "This has worked out very well both from an economical and operational stand point," said Purdy. "In fact, they have recently expanded their duties to include a gang task force."

Purdy said he would like to see sheriffs take on additional duties. "There are currently more than 40,000 outstanding warrants in BC. Our sheriffs, who are highly trained and skilled peace officers, could step into this role quite easily as well," he said.