



**Attorney General
Justice**
Office of the Minister

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December 18, 2025

Warden Penny Smith
Municipality of the District of Shelburne
warden@municipalityofshelburne.ca

Dear Warden Smith,

Thank you for your letter of September 3, 2025, and apologies for the delayed reply. I want to begin by acknowledging the fear, frustration, and fatigue many residents in Shelburne are experiencing. These concerns are real, deeply felt, and deserve to be met with action, understanding, and transparency. Ensuring that Nova Scotians feel safe in their homes, on their streets, and in their communities is central to the work of the Department of Justice.

We are grateful for the dedicated service of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in Shelburne and across the province. H Division RCMP continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to public safety while facing increasingly complex pressures — including mental health crises, addictions, property crime, and organized drug activity. Their efforts are vital; however, we recognize that policing alone cannot resolve the challenges your community is confronting.

This is why the Province undertook the Comprehensive Review of Policing in Nova Scotia — the most extensive examination of policing and public safety in decades. Informed by the voices of municipalities, law enforcement, service providers, and communities like yours, the review marked a pivotal step in modernizing how public safety is delivered and in strengthening coordination across policing, justice, and health systems.

As you are aware, because of this review the Province has committed to six foundational changes and an expansion of the Nova Scotia Provincial Police.

Among other benefits, these reforms will support improvements to the bail system by ensuring police have consistent training and tools to provide clear, evidence-based information to the courts; by enhancing inter-agency collaboration to better assess and manage risks when individuals are released on bail; and by reinforcing accountability and oversight to ensure public safety and victim protection are prioritized in decision-making. Modernizing policing and aligning it more effectively with mental health, addictions, and social supports will create a stronger, more coordinated system

— one that protects communities from repeat and violent offenders while upholding constitutional rights.

In particular, layered policing promotes public safety by combining traditional enforcement with community-based, preventative, and specialized supports. Rather than relying on police alone to respond to every public safety issue, layered policing brings together multiple service providers — including mental health professionals, social workers, bylaw officers, and community outreach teams — to address the root causes of crime and disorder. This approach ensures that individuals receive appropriate interventions, reduces strain on frontline police, and improves response times for serious incidents. By aligning enforcement with prevention, social support, and accountability, layered policing creates a more coordinated, effective system that enhances safety, builds community trust, and helps prevent crime before it occurs.

Your letter speaks to the impacts of repeat offences and the perception of a “catch and release” cycle that erodes confidence in the justice system. We agree that enforcement must be complemented by meaningful consequences for serious and repeat offenders, alongside sustained investments in mental health, addictions treatment, and prevention. The Department of Justice continues to work closely with the judiciary, Public Prosecution Service, and federal partners to strengthen bail processes and improve information sharing when individuals pose ongoing public safety risks.

At the federal level, the Government of Canada has taken steps to respond to concerns about repeat violent offenders and community safety. Recently announced amendments to the *Criminal Code* expand reverse-onus provisions for serious violent offences, particularly those involving firearms, intimate partner violence, and repeat violent offenders. Individuals charged with these offences must now demonstrate why they should be released, rather than the Crown having to prove why they should be detained. In addition, the federal government has committed to working with provinces, territories, police services, and the judiciary to enhance information sharing, enforce bail conditions more effectively, and ensure that public safety — especially the safety of victims and vulnerable populations — is appropriately considered in bail decisions. These reforms are intended to balance the constitutional right to reasonable bail with the urgent need to protect communities. Nova Scotia has been actively engaged in these discussions at a national level and we look forward to continued work together with our colleagues.

In addition to responses by police, the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* (SCAN) in Nova Scotia gives residents a formal way to raise concerns about properties they believe are being habitually used for illegal activities (such as drug dealing, illegal alcohol sales, prostitution or gambling) that adversely affect the health, safety or enjoyment of the neighbourhood. To make a complaint, a person calls the provincial toll-free Public Safety Investigation Unit (1-877-357-2337) and provides details of the property and reasons for concern; the complainant’s identity can remain confidential. After receiving a complaint, the Director may investigate, request further information, attempt informal resolution, send a warning to the property owner or occupant, or apply to the court for a “community safety order” if the criteria are met.

You are correct that no single agency or level of government can address these challenges alone. Building safer, more resilient communities requires meaningful partnership — among

municipalities, the Province, the federal government, law enforcement, health and social services, and community organizations. The Department of Justice remains committed to being an active and accountable partner in this shared work.

Thank you once again for your leadership and advocacy on behalf of your residents. Please know that the Department of Justice remains dedicated to protecting the people of Shelburne — through enforcement, compassion, collaboration, and long-term, systemic change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Armstrong". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Honourable Scott Armstrong
Attorney General and Minister of Justice