

Small Group Session

Séance en petit groupe

Commissioners / Commissaires

The Honourable / L'honorable J. Michael MacDonald,
Chair / Président

Leanne J. Fitch (Ret. Police Chief, M.O.M)

Dr. Kim Stanton

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Mass Casualty Commission Office
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II

Appearances / Comparutions

Ms. Jennifer Zahl Bruland	Daughter of John Zahl, Stepdaughter of Joanne Thomas
Ms. Renee Kannegiesser	Support
Mr. Leo Artalejo	Facilitator
Ms. Leanne Fitch	Commissioner
Mr. Michael MacDonald	Commissioner
Ms. Kim Stanton	Commissioner

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Halifax, Nova Scotia

--- Upon commencing on Thursday, September 8, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.

MR. LEO ARTALEJO: --- and we talked about why we're doing that, and the fact that it will be made into a transcript in both English and French *[sic]*.

Welcome, thank you for being here, thank you for preparing, and thank you for traveling as far as you traveled to be with us this evening. We know that you have a unique experience and that your family has a unique experience, and we know that your loved ones built a community here in Canada, but we also want to acknowledge that there are Americans who also are grieving their loss, and we're really grateful that you've come this far to spend time with us in person today. We really are looking forward to hearing what your experience has been like over the last couple of years.

Some of the topics that we're hoping to hear from you about tonight are your experience as a family member, particularly one that lives outside of the province and outside of the country. How you were able to access information during the mass casualty? What supports and services were most helpful to you and your family, and what was missing that might have helped? And the idea there is that as we are formulating our final recommendations, what are the things that we need to put in place to ensure the future families -- future families that are beyond the borders of Canada have access to supports and services that they need during these kind of events.

So we already spoke that my job is to facilitate the conversation, that I'll help with the flow or keep track of time. I've shared the three questions with you and the Commissioners that we'll use to kind of, frame our conversation tonight, and if you need a break just let us know. And if you need a break just to refer to your notes, or we're happy to recess from the room and allow you to spend some time here with your support folks.

So we'll just start with the first question. That will start with you,

1 which is, what do you want to tell us about you and your family's experience seeking
2 information and gathering support during and immediately after the mass casualty?

3 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** If it's okay, I want to start with
4 one thing. I think it's important to note that I -- I have a -- I guess I want to tell you that I
5 have a Bachelors degree in criminal justice and political science, which gives a little
6 background to -- what I bring to the table, and I brought to the table as a victim.

7 And I thank you for noting that my dad is a US citizen. I've worked
8 very hard for that to be brought up, that he was a U.S. citizen and a Navy veteran, and
9 that Joanne lived there for a long time. I think that's been forgotten even after I brought
10 it up. You know, they -- Joanne lived there a long -- lived in U.S. for most of her adult
11 life and that's something hard, that people forgot that. So thank you for bringing that up.

12 Before I get started on the question, I wanted to address the three
13 of you and with how this process is going for me tonight. I appreciate the opportunity to
14 be here, but I also wanted the three of you to know that I'm extremely disappointed in
15 the Commission for not allowing me to provide a live statement in front of the public and
16 all participants -- all participating parties. And that my only means of participating has
17 been reduced to providing a statement by transcripts, where my feelings and emotions
18 can't be seen or heard. And words -- my words can be easily twisted and
19 misrepresented. I do appreciate the opportunity, but I think it's harder to do things for
20 me personally this way. I mean no disrespect by that.

21 So going back to the first question, in the very first hours and days
22 that things happened after the mass casualty, that's a blur for me. They are a
23 nightmare, and I relive -- I relive that daily. From originally hearing about it from my
24 husband who was reading an article online, and making those initial calls and texts to
25 my dad and Jo and waiting for a response, to making the initial calls to the RCMP and
26 waiting for them to call me back. Being out of country is a completely helpless feeling. I
27 can't -- I couldn't drive anywhere and demand someone to talk to me. I couldn't go see
28 things for myself. I didn't know the hierarchy of governments and have any other places

1 to call. I had to completely rely on waiting for them to return calls and rely on the
2 information that they provided.

3 On that Monday April 20th, when the RCMP Officer called me back
4 he didn't provide me with a next of kin notification of death. He told me that my parents
5 house had been burnt to the ground, and I remember telling him that I knew that they
6 were gone. I told him that I knew they were gone, because they would have contacted
7 me by now if they were okay. If their house was burned to the ground, they would have
8 called me if they got out.

9 Our family was desperate for information. And instead of being
10 supported by the RCMP in the early days, I was tasked with attempting to locate
11 medical records and dental records for dad and Jo. This was not an easy task during
12 Covid, as so many offices were closed, and dad and Jo had moved from New Mexico
13 up to Portapique. In addition, it was more difficult because the U.S. was not reporting
14 the mass casualty. It was, you know, not many in the US knew about it. the other thing
15 was, their house was burnt to the ground and every document that would have aided us
16 in knowing where they were going to the doctor, or seeing a dentist, was gone.

17 Instead of the RCMP and the Medical Examiner's Office using their
18 power and authority to get those records, that was left to my family. That was especially
19 challenge [*sic*] -- challenging. In retrospect, it angers me. Instead of being allowed to
20 grieve I was working the case.

21 I remember being told multiple times by the officer in charge of --
22 who was in charge of the families -- being told that there were "many scenes" and that
23 they didn't know when they would get to my parents. This left me feeling that my
24 parents weren't important, that my family wasn't important. At the time, I didn't know
25 any of the other families. I didn't know any of the other victims. I had no idea how many
26 other victims were involved. I just knew that my family didn't appear to be important to
27 anybody and I had nowhere else to turn and no one else to call.

28 I asked a lot of questions, questions that they didn't have answers

1 for. I asked did my parents call 911? Did they obtain all the 911 records from the
2 neighbors? Did any of the neighbors have ring videos? Instead of using these things to
3 help the officers used them -- the officer used it as an obstacle. They said my parents'
4 phones must have been U.S. numbers, they never checked into it. One of my parents'
5 cell phones was a Canadian number and one was a U.S. number. And they said that
6 they couldn't check into it because they were U.S. numbers, even though I offered to
7 sign releases for that type of thing. But I never got answers back on either of those
8 questions. I was told that there were no ring videos in the neighborhood. I think
9 eventually I did hear that there was a video somewhere in the neighborhood, but I was
10 never given any access to that.

11 I was also told that the RCMP didn't have the right people on staff
12 to handle my parents' scene and so it would take longer for them to be able to get into
13 the scene and work the scene. And I apologize if I'm not using the right term, I'm trying
14 to be delicate and considerate of everyone. I did ask later on and recently, about the
15 qualifications of the people that worked on my parents' scene, and it's my understanding
16 that those qualifications of everyone who was there were never provided to anyone. It
17 appears that instead of a forensic anthropologist being there, which was -- I was told
18 was the reason that they were waiting so long for someone to be able to work the scene
19 -- there was never a forensic anthropologist actually at my parents' scene, but instead
20 students. That to me is incredibly disturbing. In the case this big, or in any case like
21 this, a student should never be used or tasked with that. That to me was just incredibly
22 troubling. More than troubling, that's such a minor word.

23 But I was called from the scene on more than one occasion. I was
24 asked to describe the home room by room while the officer in charge of handling the
25 families was at the scene. He called me, he was extremely upset, you could tell that he
26 was at the scene. And I was asked to describe my parents home room by room. I gave
27 them the name of a friend who had recently visited my parents home and that person
28 gave them a room-by-room description of my parents' home.

1 I was again called from the scene and told that they had found a
2 third body at my parents' home. This caused a great amount of stress for my family. If
3 the -- I believe if the RCMP had had the appropriate staff working the scene that this
4 type of issue would never have happened. It may be somebody other than students
5 had been working the scene. I know that there were RCMP Officers, but if appropriately
6 trained staff had been there that never would have happened. I can't tell you the
7 amount of stress that called -- when I was keeping my other family members informed
8 and I had to call them and say they found a third body in the home, and we were left
9 wondering who that possibly could be. The RCMP is asking us, who could this third
10 person in their home? And we had no idea and no answers to give them. There's no
11 way to describe that to you on top of all the other stress of losing the people that you
12 love.

13 On another note, my parents had -- my parents were pet lovers.
14 That came out in the media. They had two family cats that we were desperate for
15 information on, you know, we had no idea were they alive, had they escaped, were they
16 starving out there in the woods? We were desperate for information on them, and the
17 RCMP never provided us with an update what happened to Freddy and Zed. We had
18 provided them with pictures of them and we never, ever, received any information on
19 what happened to our cats. When families have lost everything -- we weren't the only
20 family to lose everything, but when families have lost everything worrying about, you
21 know, your beloved family pets, it adds additional stress. And any level of comfort that
22 they can provide, they should try to provide.

23 If I've strayed off your main question, I apologize.

24 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** You don't have to be sorry about that.

25 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** But a couple of main examples
26 to your question is, you know, meetings being set up with the RCMP. A prime example
27 I can think of is, I was sent notice -- and there is significant time change and that is no
28 one's fault but there is a significant time difference between where I live and Nova

1 Scotia. But I was sent notice very early in the morning on 6-15-2020, I believe it was
2 6:50 in the morning that I was to have a meeting at noon. I was given less than five
3 hours to prepare and request time off for that meeting. I was not given the option of a
4 meeting in person. I was not given the option of a Zoom meeting to see who I'd be
5 speaking with, and I was not given the option of a different day. I was told that that
6 meeting would be by phone.

7 That meeting was held on my father's birthday. The very first
8 birthday without my father. That was my only meeting with the RCMP. To me that was
9 so cold and uncaring. I had to keep myself in check. I got all my answers *[sic]* together,
10 called my siblings, get all of their questions together, and speak to the RCMP. I was to
11 act without showing any emotion, ask them my questions, get my answers, and go
12 about my business. That's how I was treated. They knew -- they had been provided my
13 parents dates of birth and dates of death, that was public knowledge, and that's when
14 they chose to have that meeting with me. There was no question of, you know, could I
15 have another day if possible? And it -- that's one example.

16 I asked many questions, and I was told that they would get back to
17 me, or I was told that they couldn't release information as things were still under
18 investigation. When I provided information oftentimes it wasn't followed up on. I was
19 told that they were busy. An example of this is Joanne's text messages. When I
20 provided them this information, I provided them a significant time period after that
21 meeting. When I gave them those text messages, which was an important piece of
22 information, I was told that they -- that they were busy, and they hadn't had an
23 opportunity to follow up on it. They never followed up on it and I never received
24 response from them on it.

25 Another example services that were to be accessible to all victims
26 weren't. It should have been checked to ensure that they were accessible to all victims.
27 An example of this is the 800 number for mental health. When that number was given
28 out it was never checked to see if it was accessible to the United States. When I called

1 it, you couldn't get through on it. I had to call -- I had to call the victims services and tell
2 them, do you know that your number is not accessible from the United States? They
3 acted shocked. Nobody had bothered to check. Counseling services, there was many,
4 many, months, six months or more before my counselor could be added, and then it
5 took more months for them to figure out that she needed to be paid in U.S. dollars.
6 things like that became my issue to bring forward to them.

7 Another thing is I have a counselor for trauma, I have a trauma
8 counselor and I have a grief counselor. One counselor made sure I was assigned to the
9 other, it wasn't my choice to choose two different counselors. My insurance is not
10 paying for either one because they're considered out of network, and I'm paying out of
11 my own pocket a car payment -- greater than my car payment per month for my other
12 counselor. In listening to Victim Services talk to the Commission they had -- I heard
13 them say that it was their hope that no victims have to pay for counseling out of pocket.
14 That's not my case. They've also put a limit on the amount of counseling. My limit's
15 been met and my counselors -- my one counselor who is being paid is requesting
16 additional dollars. I think it's very short sighted the amount of money that they've set
17 aside for victims. Other members of my family, it's been such a challenge to get
18 counseling through, you know, as a U.S. citizen, that they haven't even sought out
19 counseling.

20 In addition, the family liaison officer didn't have an 800 number.
21 Anytime I call the family liaison number I paid for that. Caregivers, the RCMP, other
22 individuals, I was frequently -- when I would talk to them, I was frequently met with the
23 ongoing response of, "We've never had to deal with this before." As if I had had to deal
24 with this before. I found myself repeatedly apologizing to them for having to go through
25 this, telling them, "I'm so sorry you have to do this", instead of them telling that to me.
26 That's just a couple of the main examples.

27 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you.

28 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** There are many more of these.

1 I have a whole list of them if you'd like more, I'm happy to give you. Those are just a
2 few of the main ones.

3 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** I'm wondering, could you just say a little
4 more about the family liaison officer. I know you mentioned about the phone calls, was
5 that a helpful resource for you or what was your experience with ---

6 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** The one phone caller received
7 with everyone -- all the officers?

8 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** No, no. The, I believe it was
9 Commissioner -- or Wayne Bent, Skipper Bent.

10 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Skipper Bent, yeah.

11 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** That you said you tried to call him, and he
12 didn't have an 800 number. But I just wanted to hear, was that an important resource
13 for you? Not the RCMP and not the investigating officer, but if you could talk a little bit
14 about that role, the family liaison officer?

15 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Was he -- was his role
16 important for me?

17 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Was that contact helpful at all to you as a
18 family, or how, or not?

19 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** It -- yes. it was important for
20 me. it was -- we weren't given another option. So if we didn't have that option, I believe
21 I wouldn't have had any option. I think there was definitely -- that role needs
22 improvement, or do you just want to know how -- well, I have ideas for that that I can
23 bring up later, but was he helpful to me? Yeah.

24 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Yeah.

25 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Was he harmful to me? Yes.

26 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay.

27 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** It was both.

28 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay.

1 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I think the need for a family --
2 there's definitely a need for a family liaison officer. I think when I learned that one
3 person that was lost, that their family received two officers and that the rest of us who
4 lost people, family members, loved ones, shared one officer, that to me seems very
5 wrong. I believe that he was overtasked and couldn't handle -- I know he -- you know,
6 what I heard in his testimony is he felt that he was equipped to handle all of us. I think if
7 there was more than one family liaison officer that would have gone better. There's --
8 that was extremely -- I think at times maybe we would have received information
9 differently. Did I answer that?

10 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** You did, yeah.

11 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Okay.

12 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Do you need a break?

13 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I do.

14 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** You do. Okay.

15 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Please.

16 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Would you like a break by yourself, or
17 would you -- like recess?

18 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Please.

19 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay.

20 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Thanks.

21 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Yeah, that would be great.

22 I will just come back in five or 10 minutes ---

23 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Thank you. That should be
24 fine. Thank you.

25 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** --- and just check in before I everybody
26 back.

27 **--- End of : 20220908 SGS ZAHL BRULAND AUD Pt1of4**

28 **--- Start of : 20220908 SGS ZAHL BRULAND AUD Pt2of4**

1 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay. So just for the record, we took a
2 short break to hear clarification.

3 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** there were a couple of things I
4 wanted to clarify if that's okay?

5 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Absolutely.

6 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** The first thing I want to clarify
7 is I -- it's really hard to talk about -- for me it's hard to talk about my personal experience
8 because I don't -- I don't want you to think that I'm saying my experience was so much
9 worse than somebody else's. I am well aware that my experience was what it was, but
10 I'm not trying to say that my experience is any worse than any of my Scotia Strong
11 family, because that is not -- that is not my intent. So please don't take it that way.

12 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** No.

13 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I can't make you take things
14 one way or another, but please, that not my intent.

15 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** That's -- I -- we didn't ---

16 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Yeah. No -- that didn't even cross
17 my mind.

18 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** So it's, just in preparing for
19 this, that's a really hard thing to do because it's hard to pull your own statement
20 because, for me it's hard to say that, because in bringing my situation forward I don't
21 want to take away from somebody else's. The other thing is -- there's a couple of
22 things. In the United States when this happened, I don't know if I made it clear, but
23 things were not being reported at all. COVID was so -- was the entire news. So the
24 news that everyone else was getting about this that was 24/7 -- my understanding was
25 24/7 up here, was not happening. Like, my community that I live in still does not know
26 what happened. My employer on my coworkers, they still do not get how big this is.

27 And so, the places that we were calling to try to get information
28 from -- about dad and Joanne's medical records and their dental records, had certainly

1 not heard of it at all. And there's also something called HIPAA laws which protect
2 people's medical and dental information in the United States. I don't know if they have
3 that here, but everything is extremely protected, and so for me to call, even though I'm
4 next of kin, for me to call out of the blue and not have any proof of death, have any
5 proof of anything, and try to get that information what's really, incredibly difficult. And
6 you know, whereas when we called the dental office in Maine, you know and I got a
7 hold of somebody in Maine who was the head of the dentist office finally, they had a
8 bunch of dental clinics -- they had at least heard of it. But when we were calling New
9 Mexico no one had heard of what was going on. So if that can give some clarification
10 as to what we were actually up against.

11 The other thing is, when -- I'm not sure if I made it clear -- well, I
12 know I didn't make it clear of who I was referring to, I think I made it sound like I was
13 dealing with many different people. Who I was hearing from, from the RCMP, was
14 Skipper and I guess I was trying to be careful in saying that. I wasn't hearing from many
15 different officers, I was hearing from Skipper, and Skipper was overtasked. I believe
16 that he was trying to do the best job. I think he's a very dedicated officer and I think he
17 was trying his hardest. I think -- and I'm not trying to rake him over the coals, but I think
18 he was overtasked, and I know this because -- I know he's dedicated because I know
19 he was trying his best.

20 I had many conversations with him and there was another situation
21 with him where I spent time on the phone, where he had had a rough day and I talked
22 him through that, and as a victim I never should be put in the situation where I'm doing
23 that. I don't -- it's not something where I think he did it intentionally or anything like that,
24 but he had definitely had a rough day and -- but again it's not a situation where a victim
25 should ever have to counsel someone and tell them they're doing you know a great job,
26 and they should continue to, you know, feel like they are doing a good job and not let
27 things get to them. I don't know if that clarifies things for you, but that's how I know that
28 he had too much on his plate.

1 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Helpful. It's helpful that we're hearing
2 about the clarity of that family liaison role and what is in his scope and when it's not in
3 scope, that's helpful for us. Does that feel like you clarified the previous statements?

4 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I think so. Does it provide
5 clarification for the three of you?

6 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Thank you.

7 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Yeah.

8 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So if it's okay, we'll move on to round two?

9 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Yes.

10 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay. So the round two question is, much
11 of the work still lies ahead for that -- much of the work that still lies ahead for this
12 Commission is to formulate the recommendations in a way that will be effective and
13 meaningful for families in the future. Which issues are most important to you and your
14 family for the Commission to focus on as we finalize our recommendations?

15 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I've thought about this question
16 -- I've been thinking about this question for a long time, as I'm sure you have. I have
17 many issues here. One is resources must be accessible for all victims. The
18 assumption that should be made in plan for, for any casualty, is that someone out of
19 province or out of country could be involved. All services should be equally accessible
20 and should be kept in the forefront that each victim and family is unique, and resources
21 must adapt for this. I can't emphasize that enough. One size does not fit all. Don't
22 assume that we can all access everything. Don't assume that I I'm able to --that I have
23 access to all the news reports. I don't. Don't assume that your phone number works for
24 me. It doesn't. I was lucky that I have some knowledge of the court system, not in
25 Canada but in the U.S., if I didn't, I can't imagine what I would have done.

26 The family liaison and victims services training support is a must.
27 Families should have information prior to any news media and someone who is "boots
28 on the ground" like Skipper, should not be a family liaison officer, that should be very

1 separate. I think that that separation should be there, because I think if you're an officer
2 working -- working the case, you can't provide that service to the families. It needs to be
3 separate.

4 In addition, the RCMP should be required to be transparent with
5 families. I realize that when a case is active and in the investigative stages that they
6 can't provide all the information. However, families should be able to receive more
7 information than what is being provided to the public. It was obvious that no family
8 member was involved in this. They should have additional access to information.

9 This one I think is crucial and I was so surprised by this, is that the
10 RCMP must develop and implement active shooter training that takes place outside of
11 the classroom or building. Training in different locations, lighting, and terrain, that is
12 focused on saving lives of citizens. And I mean saving lives of citizens, capturing
13 perpetrators and focused on officer safety.

14 It's essential that assistance be put in place for families regarding
15 obtaining SIN numbers and other financial issues with mass casualties. Dad and
16 Joanne's home was burnt to the ground, all of their personal documents were in their
17 home. We had no SIN numbers for either of them, we received no help from the
18 Canadian government on this. We live in another country. There are so many areas
19 where something simple could have been done by the Canadian government that would
20 have saved my family hours, days, and weeks of work. Some of the support needed
21 was very simple, some was more complex.

22 I will say Colchester County was very forward thinking. They
23 granted assistance for burial expenses early on, that allowed me a sense of relief
24 immediately that I knew when dad and Joanne were located that I could at least start
25 some process with, you know, what to do as far as I couldn't do a burial right away, but I
26 could start some process and how to handle their bodies. And they also granted -- you
27 know, so they granted the burial expenses early on, and they also were forward thinking
28 in that day found a group of pro bono attorneys, which was extremely helpful for our

1 family. The pro bono attorneys worked with us. Our attorney was extremely generous
2 with her time and working with our estate. If we didn't have that I don't know what we
3 would have done. I just think Colchester County, we were blessed with what they did
4 for us. But Nova Scotia and the Canadian government, there's so much that they could
5 have done. And as -- I can't speak for what the other victims went through, but us living
6 out of country this has been a nightmare for us, and it's a nightmare that continues. And
7 I -- people not realizing what it's like to be working on a death with two different
8 countries, I don't wish it upon anyone.

9 My next recommendation is the RCMP appears to be broken. I
10 need to tell you when this happened to dad and Joanne I was like, we have the RCMP,
11 they are top notch. I thought that they were number one. With what I do I come from --
12 I have so much respect for law enforcement and I really thought that we were being
13 handled by top notch and I had -- that we were so lucky to be being handled by the
14 RCMP. I'm ashamed to say I don't feel that way anymore, and I -- the RCMP does
15 appear to be broken. I worry for my friends and family that rely on them for safety.

16 There are so many issues that have come forward, from the alerts
17 the public, to not having air support available at all times, failing to ask for assistance
18 from other law enforcements, to missing notebooks, and the selling decommissioned
19 vehicles, to the size of the county and saying they can't adequately police it. I think it's
20 important for you to know that the county that I reside in and I work in, is equal in size to
21 the county in question, to the county here. It's almost identical in square kilometers and
22 square miles. In my county they do not complain about getting from one end of the
23 county to the other when a call goes out for assistance. I also should say I'm not a law
24 enforcement officer, but I don't -- I've never -- it's not something that's discussed in the
25 media. The county I reside in is largely rural, there is a city in there, but it's effectively
26 patrolled. That can be done. When something happens all agencies in area respond,
27 they can respond, and they will respond. This is a problem that can be fixed.

28 So those are my main suggestions there.

1 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you. Do you need a break, or
2 should we go to the third question?

3 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** If we could take a break first?

4 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay.

5 --- End of : 20220908 SGS ZAHL BRULAND AUD Pt2of4

6 --- Start of :20220908 SGS ZAHL BRULAND AUD Pt3of4

7 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So we just took a second break after round
8 two and we're back for the round three question which I will read to you. Are there other
9 things that would be important for the Commission to understand when it comes to your
10 experience seeking information and getting support during and after the mass casualty?
11 Really this question is just what other things, that you haven't had a chance to speak
12 about tonight, are important to you and your family?

13 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I guess one of the things that is
14 only related to my family just remembering again -- well, this isn't really -- each family is
15 unique and remember that you're dealing with human beings. And this appears that it
16 was often forgotten by many people. With my family I feel like I was consistently
17 fighting for people to remember that my dad was a U.S. citizen. And I feel like after I
18 met with you and ask you to acknowledge that and then my family felt marginalized by
19 that not being acknowledged, I felt like you initially tried to address that.

20 However, I feel that by saying "Nova Scotia, Canada, and beyond",
21 that continued to marginalise us. We're not "and beyond", it was the United States.
22 There were not many countries involved, there was the United States involved. And by
23 saying "and beyond", it reduced me to -- and my family to being nameless, our country
24 being nameless. There were other people affected by this that were "and beyond" but
25 our family was one of those most affected, and our country was one of those most
26 affected. And I felt like you heard me the first time we talked, I felt like all three of you
27 heard me, and I felt like -- I know it was addressed, I watched. I know you addressed it
28 one day, and you addressed it by name, and I really appreciated that. It was heard by

1 my family. However, there were attorneys that continued, Commission counsel and
2 other attorneys that were allowed to continue to say “all of Canada” and “all of Nova
3 Scotia” and that was never addressed, and you had the power to do that and I wish that
4 you would have. I feel by not addressing it you were saying that it's okay to do that.
5 And that's just my thoughts on it.

6 I feel that everyone who was involved in this process can make a
7 situation better, or they can make it harder than it has to be, and that's a choice that
8 they make. For me, I'm choosing that I want to make things better. I want to make
9 things better because there will be another victim, there will be many more victims, we
10 saw that happen in the last week. And I want to make things better for the next victim.
11 That's just my choice. However, I don't think that I should have to be apologizing to
12 those people who have to be tasked with providing services to victims, or for the fact
13 that they are providing those services or asked to assist with tragedy that I'm the victim
14 of. Family members shouldn't have to fight for services or recognition of their loved
15 ones.

16 I also don't think that Commission counsel should have been able
17 to sensationalize what my family went through, and the other families went through.
18 Words are important. Calling what we went through carnage and using certain words
19 like that to over sensationalize it, I was watching those things. This isn't a made for TV
20 drama, and certain counsel took it that way and chose to over sensationalize it in my
21 opinion. At times I felt that certain Commission counsel did not treat people with care or
22 with the professionalism and courtesy that they could have. Myself, I know that my
23 counsel brought that to the commission's attention, and I don't believe that that situation
24 was ever dealt with, and if it was, I never heard about it. That individual was also
25 allowed to go on and to question -- continue to take a very active part in the
26 proceedings. I found that hurtful.

27 I'm happy to continue to provide more information on that, I don't
28 know that I want to do in a recording.

1 The other thing that I think is important to bring to mind is that I've
2 heard it said too many times that they couldn't have saved anyone in Portapique. They
3 had the opportunity to save my parents when they went in. My parents were still alive.
4 That's been proven. There were -- where they interviewed the three officers that were
5 first to arrive, it was brought to the attention during the proceedings that the three
6 officers walked by my parents' home and it was still standing. The quote was that they
7 had looked at it a couple minutes, they had a good opportunity to look at it, and that no
8 one was on the outside. That the buildings -- this is two different quotes -- that the
9 buildings they weren't on fire the second time they were there were on fire later when
10 they were out on the third time.

11 My parents are still alive when they arrived in Portapique. My
12 parents were still alive when they went by the building two times. I don't blame those
13 officers, but those officers did make a choice, or somebody in command made a choice
14 that evening. I believe my parents could have been saved, and who knows who else
15 could have been saved that night and the next day. But to say that no one could have
16 been saved in Portapique isn't true, and I think it's important to acknowledge that.

17 Those are some of the main -- the main points that I, I guess that I
18 want to make. I guess some of the other things that I wanted to say is that I feel that
19 there are -- there are a number of groups that I know you've had to acknowledge that
20 come forward. I think that they all have significant issues that need to be addressed
21 somewhere. I don't know that they need to be addressed in this Commission and I don't
22 know that they all have a lot to do with what happened to my family and to the other
23 families and sometimes I've felt that they've overshadowed what's happened to our
24 families. I personally feel that at times what they've brought forward has overshadowed
25 what happened to my parents, and what happened to the 21 other people who lost their
26 lives. That's been hurtful.

27 I don't blame the three of you individually, but it has been hurtful
28 and it's been hard to hear. I've heard other people that say that they felt supported

1 through all of this. I need you to know that I have not once been allowed to appear at
2 the proceedings. I haven't been given the opportunity to come. I didn't know I was
3 allowed to come. I had to fight to come and do this in person. I have been allowed to
4 watch the proceedings from my basement on breaks from work. I've heard so many
5 people say that they felt supported. I haven't felt supported. I've done this alone. It
6 hasn't been easy. It's something that I've done because I think it's important, it's
7 important for my family, and it's important for the next people to come.

8 I think that's all I have to say about this.

9 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay. Thank you. Do you want one more
10 break?

11 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I just want one more break to
12 make sure I have everything, and I just appreciate it.

13 **--- End of : 20220908 SGS ZAHL BRULAND AUD Pt3of4**

14 **--- Start of : 20220908 SGS ZAHL BRULAND AUD Pt4of4**

15 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay. We just took one more break and
16 we're back to summarize and just hear any of your final thoughts.

17 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Thank you. I appreciate it;
18 thank you for another break. Thanks for being generous about it, I appreciate that.

19 I feel the need to clarify a couple of things. When I talked about the
20 family liaison officer being detrimental, I thought of one more good example. I'm very
21 protective of my parents. I think most of us are protective of our family. There's been a
22 lot of timelines that have come out, and I think it was maybe even before the
23 Commission was started timelines started coming out. And I had asked about timelines
24 from the very beginning when this very first happened. I was told that my parents -- I
25 learned, kind of through almost a grapevine kind of thing, that my parents were killed
26 first, which I knew wasn't true. I knew it couldn't be true. I'm not an expert investigator.
27 I'm not an investigator. Just from my experience and things, I just knew that there was
28 no way that they could be. They didn't have a relationship with him, he didn't have

1 anything going on with them, why -- I was trying to put together why he would possibly
2 do that to them first.

3 And I found out that Skipper had said that -- had told someone that
4 my parents were killed first. And I called him, because if Skipper had that belief, why
5 hadn't he told that to me, because he certainly should be telling me before he told
6 anyone else that. And I called him, and I confronted him, and I asked them -- I asked
7 him, "Skipper, are you telling people that dad and Joanne were killed first?" And he
8 said, "Well, I guess I did, but it wasn't as the RCMP, it was just my opinion". And I said,
9 "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I told a family member that" -- meaning another
10 family member, not someone in my family -- "that I thought it was my opinion that they
11 probably were, that it just makes sense that they were. But I didn't say it as the RCMP".
12 And I said, "But you are the RCMP. When you talk to people you're talking as the
13 RCMP". In his position as the family liaison officer, when he speaks, he's speaking as
14 the RCMP, and he couldn't understand that.

15 He couldn't put that together that when he speaks, he's speaking
16 as an RCMP Officer. And he couldn't understand why that would be upsetting to me.
17 And that was hard, that was hard to handle. And then later when I gave him the
18 information about Joanne's texts, that wasn't followed up on, and that did go against the
19 timelines. It did provide substantial information, irrefutable information that went against
20 that, and it was never followed up on by him. That's concerning.

21 The other thing -- some things about information being followed up
22 on and information being provided with -- some of the information when I provided that
23 to attorneys for the Commission, I need to let you know there was problems with getting
24 the information corrected. I provided that -- those same phone calls -- or texts, they
25 weren't phone calls, to Commission counsel and they were put on the record incorrectly.
26 On the record it originally -- it said that Joanne was having a texting conversation with a
27 family member and that it was one conversation. The time was also reported
28 incorrectly.

1 When I talked to Commission counsel about that, as did our
2 attorneys, I told them that that information -- this was in a Zoom call -- was incorrect. I
3 said it was not one person, and it was not a family member. It was two conversations
4 that were being had, and that the time was wrong. And I was told that was my opinion.
5 And I said, "It's not my opinion, it's fact". It's not opinion when everything is, you know,
6 done. There are certain things that are opinions, there are certain things that are facts.
7 They said, "That's your opinion", and they didn't change it for me. I don't think it's been
8 changed to this day. That shouldn't happen that way. It shouldn't be so hard to get
9 facts corrected on the record. And I think you should be made aware of that.

10 And that's -- I guess that's what I have for you.

11 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay.

12 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** And I appreciate your time.

13 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you for your time and your courage,
14 and of important insights. Just checking with the Commissioners to see if there's any
15 follow up questions or anything they'd like to say.

16 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Thank you, Leo. And can I call
17 you Jennifer?

18 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** You can call me Jennifer,
19 yeah.

20 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Thank you, Jennifer. I'm not an
21 expert, but this was difficult for you. This was reliving a lot for you and that adds to my
22 personal gratitude for you for coming here and explaining the very important context
23 which was eye opening for me, and so very important to hear, and you clearly did a lot
24 of -- put a lot of thought into it and did a lot of work to so carefully lay out your
25 experiences and your concerns. And I honestly greatly appreciate that and thank you --
26 thank you for that. And I think you said courage, Leo, for your courage.

27 And what I am particularly appreciative of is that you have concerns
28 about our process and you've explained them to us, and you did so so respectfully and

1 thoughtfully. I just want you to know that I very much appreciate that and I know that
2 that wasn't easy either. And I also want to address the meeting that we had in October,
3 and you made that point to us, and I sincerely apologize that we -- we responded and
4 didn't keep it up. And that's just a miss on us, and I'm sorry for -- I'm very sorry for that.
5 When I think back about adding "and beyond", that is impersonal and it's not the United
6 States and it's not your family, and I apologize for that. That's -- yeah. That's just an
7 apology without qualification. So ---

8 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Thank you.

9 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** --- I just want you to know that.

10 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Thank you.

11 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** And thank you so much for
12 enduring yet another very difficult experience, but it was very helpful for us.

13 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** Like Commissioner MacDonald has
14 said, I know how much I appreciate having the opportunity to spend this time personally
15 and without masks this time, and a little bit closer. To hear more from your heart and
16 from your experience. I know that our first meeting was really about us trying to
17 determine what your expectation was of the process that we were undertaking. And I
18 can say that we have tried really hard to get it as right as possible. And I think it's really
19 important that you've raised for us the places where we have missed the mark, and I
20 know that we'll continue to talk about that.

21 If there's been any failure in communication on what you can
22 participate in, I think that that needs to be looked into as well, the way that -- where that
23 fell down. Being a farm girl myself, listening to your concern about your dad and
24 Joanne's pets and the extra anguish that you had thinking that there was a third person,
25 those are details that are important for us to hear. I just can't thank you enough for
26 sharing.

27 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I -- when you bring up what I
28 can participate in, if I can address that? I was -- it was conveyed to me that I couldn't

1 come here this time because of cost concerns, which was -- that I was told were
2 brought up by the Commission. So that was very -- that was the message that I was
3 given. So I should let you know that. I did convey that to Leo.

4 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Yeah.

5 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Thank you so much for coming.
6 And thank you, Renee for coming as well to support your friend.

7 **MS. RENEE KANNEGIESSER:** Certainly.

8 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** We are really appreciative of your
9 presence at well. And we know you've travelled a long way and you are probably
10 exhausted as well.

11 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** I couldn't have done it without
12 Renee.

13 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Yeah, thank you Renee, I should mention.

14 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** You were -- Renee, you were here in
15 October as well, yeah?

16 Yeah.

17 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** You have a good friend there.

18 **MS. JENNIFER ZAHL BRULAND:** Thank you. The best. Thank
19 you so much, I really appreciate your time.

20 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you.

21 --- Session concludes
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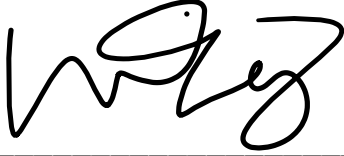
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CERTIFICATION

1

2 I, NANCY EWING, hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate transcription of
3 the audio recording provided to the best of my skill and ability, and I so swear.

4

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Ewing', written over a horizontal line.

5

6

7 NANCY EWING