

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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II Appearances / Comparutions

Mr. Ryan Farrington	Son of Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn (virtual)
Ms. Sandra McCulloch	Counsel (virtual)
Mr. Leo Artalejo	Facilitator
Ms. Maureen Wheller	Commission Counsel
Mr. Jamie Van Wart	Commission Counsel
Ms. Grace MacCormick	Counsel (virtual)

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Truro, Nova Scotia

1
2 --- Upon commencing on Tuesday, September 13, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.

3 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** The mass casualty when it all first
4 started, getting information was -- it was hard. We contacted the RCMP several times
5 on April 19th just to find out if my parents' house was burnt down, if they were there,
6 they were taken someplace else because we couldn't get a hold of them.

7 That lasted for hours into the morning of the 20th just after midnight
8 when I called the RCMP back, the Bible Hill Detachment and I demanded to know if that
9 civic number was burnt to the ground or if there -- they were standing. And finally, when
10 I got told that the house was burnt to the ground and that's the only information that they
11 had at that time.

12 It's frustrating because I have distant relatives that are down there
13 that I don't even know one being a police officer, an RCMP officer, and he found out on
14 the 19th early in the day from another officer, so I had extended family that knew, but
15 nobody bothered to call and tell -- tell us what was going on. That was really upsetting
16 that in the Fundamental [sic] Documents that this officer knew before us and -- which I
17 give it he is an RCMP officer, but I mean, if they were able to tell him that he has
18 possible family in the casualty there's no reason why they couldn't have called us and
19 told us the exact same thing.

20 I found out about everything through Facebook, that there was
21 even a mass shooting. That's how I found out on April 19th that it was going down.

22 I'll just back up a bit. Me and my mom talked like literally every
23 day. She would message me. There'd be -- say 10:00 -- 10:00 your time, so it'd be
24 9:00 a.m. my time. Every morning by 9:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m. the latest, just say, "Hey, pal.
25 How's your day going? Are you working today?". Didn't matter. It was every day.

26 And I didn't see that -- there was no text when I woke up and then
27 to flip to Facebook and see the picture of the, you know, Portapique Beach Road,
28 Orchard Beach Drive, that there's an active shooter. Um, that was hard. That was --

1 that was hard.

2 What was the other part of your question?

3 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** It was really about seeking information,
4 which it sounds like you were seeking information about the condition of your parents,
5 but then ---

6 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Yeah.

7 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** --- how did you get support after that, or
8 maybe you could explain a little bit about what happened next.

9 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Okay. So as I'm trying -- I called, like I
10 said, throughout the day and the evening into the early morning hours. I believe by that
11 point I had did a news interview with Kayla Hounsell to try to get some information, just
12 put out there to see if, you know, perhaps maybe my parents did make it to safety and
13 just didn't have a phone.

14 Afterwards, Victim Services was absolutely amazing. They
15 reached out. They've been amazing with -- with me this entire time. I couldn't ask of
16 anything better from them.

17 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** When did you hear from the RCMP next, if
18 you recall?

19 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** It was, I believe, April 21st and it
20 would have been Skipper Wayne Bent then that said they recovered remains from the
21 house, and that was the first time I heard from any RCMP officer.

22 I know in the Fundamental [sic] Documents of the Notification that it
23 was said that he notified my brother on the 19th, which is -- is not correct, but my
24 brother doesn't want to have -- my brother is -- doesn't want to take part in this. He's --
25 he works three jobs just to forget about everything that's ever happened, so he wouldn't
26 do a sworn affidavit or anything like that to change it and I didn't pursue it with him
27 because I respect how he feels.

28 But again, I believe it was the 21st when we first heard from Mr.

1 Bent that the bodies were recovered.

2 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** I'm just wondering if you could say a little
3 bit more about the family liaison role and if that was helpful to you in the weeks following
4 the mass casualty.

5 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Not really. It wasn't helpful to me at
6 all. I mean, we sent some emails back and forth, but as to try to find out any
7 information, sometimes it was a couple days before I heard back from him, which
8 understanding now that, I mean, for all the victims he was the only liaison officer, I can
9 understand that, you know, he's swamped with a ton of people probably calling and
10 texting him. But basically, I didn't hear from him very often for the first probably few
11 weeks. And then once they identified my parents, he gradually sent out more emails
12 with his cell phone number and stuff so I could text him directly.

13 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** How are you doing, Ryan? Do you feel like
14 taking a break, or how are things??

15 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** No, I'm okay. I'm all right, yeah.
16 Yeah, I'm okay.

17 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** I really just want to acknowledge your
18 courage. It's a hard thing to talk about. We do appreciate it. It's going to help us
19 formulate the recommendations that are so important to the work of this Commission.

20 So that leads me to the second question, which is that much of the
21 work that lies ahead for the Commission is to make the final recommendations such that
22 they will be effective and meaningful. Which issues are most important to you and your
23 family for the Commission to focus on as we finalize those recommendations?

24 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** One would be, obviously, you guys
25 have heard this a lot, it's been brought up, I think, almost every time we've -- I've been
26 down is the Ready Alert system. I know the -- some of the higher-ups are saying -- like
27 in the RCMP are saying, well, we don't want to just send out an alert because it scares
28 the public. I think in any active shooter situation when that comes in -- sorry. I got a call

1 coming through.

2 When that comes in as, you know, a shooting, there should be
3 some sort of alert that's at least sent out that general area to alert the public. I'd rather
4 be scared than be dead. And doing it via Twitter, I'm 42 and I don't have Twitter, you
5 know. My mom has a cell phone. She's constantly on it, you know. I think that's one of
6 the biggest things.

7 And -- and yesterday, for an example, I think we can learn from that
8 -- I don't know if you guys heard of the mass -- or of the shooting in Toronto where they
9 sent out the alert right away and they were able to get the suspect and obviously he
10 was killed, but I mean, they sent out an emergency alert.

11 I think that's the biggest thing, is implementing that because I know
12 it was approximately, I think, 25 minutes after the first 9-1-1 call that I believe my
13 parents were killed. I'm not 100 percent sure on the timeline, but I think it was in or
14 around there. So the Ready Alert system, I think, is something that really needs to be
15 utilized in the future.

16 I appreciate the Government of Nova Scotia taking a stand on the
17 sale of decommissioned police vehicles and memorabilia. I work in the security field,
18 and we -- we use those decommissioned vehicles as well, but I think a federal law of
19 some sort would be good to have where, you know, the average person just can't get
20 these decommissioned vehicles and then suit them up to look like a police car.

21 I mean, having it -- I mean, if you're -- if you own a security
22 business, then yeah, you can -- you can purchase those for your security business. I
23 don't know how that would work or entail. But I mean, I see it all the time down here.
24 There's so many of them. And the first time I got pulled over by one was just after my
25 parents were killed and -- and I -- it was so hard to see it, so. I didn't know if it was a
26 real cop or not because he was in a -- it was, what you call it, a ghost car. Phantom car.

27 So I think something around there would help, basically. I don't
28 know.

1 I don't understand the reason for having to have uniforms, you
2 know, to be kept as memorabilia.

3 And then notebook keeping is -- is another recommendation. I can
4 understand -- we heard there a couple weeks ago when I was there that, you know, a
5 lot of these officers take their -- their notebooks home when they're finished or they
6 retire. I don't understand that. Even in my field, I have to hand my notebooks in to my
7 boss and it's kept in a file for seven years.

8 The OPP reached out to me not too long ago, a couple weeks ago,
9 and asked me a couple questions on recommendations that they want to implement
10 before the mass casualty implements anything that they can do at a detachment level or
11 a provincial level, and I asked them about the notebooks. And the Ontario Provincial
12 Police keep their notebooks in their detachment and then once they retire, it goes to
13 their head office in Orillia and is kept for life.

14 So I think that's another thing we need to look at because I found
15 watching these -- these inquiries that a lot of them didn't have notes or they weren't
16 ready for -- for the Commissioners when they knew that, you know, this was going on
17 and those are pertinent to the mass casualty. So I think that's another key issue that
18 needs to be addressed as well.

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

20 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** No problem.

21 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Is there anything else in terms of issues
22 and recommendations before we move on to the third question? Anything that comes
23 to mind, or...?

24 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** The bulletin, the officer safety bulletin.

25 I don't understand, I think there should be something implemented
26 where that stays on for -- for life. Like again, referring to the Ontario Provincial Police, I
27 spoke to them regarding that and told them how it purged after a few years. They keep
28 theirs on file for life.

1 I think that would have been a huge thing, a huge help early on. It
2 may not have saved my parents, but it may have helped the people on April 19th if they
3 had that officer safety bulletin handy. So I think something where to keep that for a
4 quite significant time would be helpful.

5 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay. I just want to ask before we move
6 on to the last question, is there anything that was particularly supportive for you or your
7 family?

8 All the issues that you raised are very important. I just wanted to
9 look specifically at the supports and services that we could offer to family members. I'm
10 just wondering if there's anything there that comes to mind as particularly helpful.

11 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** It's -- I mean, Victim Services have
12 been great. I haven't been able to -- I haven't gotten any counselling. I just recently
13 reached out for some counselling, but it's hard working with Victim Services in Nova
14 Scotia and then try to find a person that deals with grief down here and then trying to
15 get them to direct bill it or do whatever they got to do because I can't afford counselling.
16 I barely work any more. I just -- since this happened, I have nothing left in me.

17 That day they took -- that day, he took a huge part of my life and
18 I'm trying to get it back, but I don't know if I -- I don't know if I ever will.

19 But yeah, they've been a huge help and they're setting me up --
20 trying to set me up with some counselling, but like I said, they don't know anybody down
21 here, so I'm trying to find people that are in this area. And Trenton is not a very big city.
22 It's a military city, but it's not overly big. It's not like Toronto or Halifax or anything like
23 that. It's -- so finding counselling out this way is difficult.

24 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Ryan, I know that you have a call set up
25 with Mary from the Commission Mental Health Support Team, and that's something that
26 we could definitely help you find those mental health resources. That's a big part of
27 what the team is meant to do.

28 So I'll relay on to her that you've been having trouble finding

1 resources in your jurisdiction and you can also mention that to her tomorrow.

2 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Yeah. Okay.

3 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay. How are you doing? Are you ---

4 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** I'm okay. I'm all right. I'm used to it. I
5 don't have water here. Sorry for the horsy voice.

6 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** No, I just really appreciate you doing this.

7 [REDACTED] C1

8 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** [REDACTED] C1

9 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** [REDACTED] C1 Wow.

10 Well, we do appreciate your time and we know that it's -- it wouldn't
11 be probably the day you would pick, necessarily, to spend time with us, but we're
12 grateful for the time.

13 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Well, I'm glad I can be here.

14 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** The third and final question is, is there --
15 are there other things that would be important for the Commission or the
16 Commissioners that are here to understand when it comes to your experience or your
17 family's experience, particularly around the topics of seeking information and gathering
18 support?

19 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** I definitely think that you need more
20 than one person to be able to contact or having more than one person in charge of
21 contacting families.

22 Sorry. I'm in the shed and there's a train going by.

23 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** That's okay. Take a breath.

24 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Yeah, that would be my -- one of my
25 biggest things, is -- is communicate. Like it just didn't seem like the RCMP wanted to
26 communicate and, I mean, there was times that Bent wouldn't even answer me because
27 I was, we were upset with him at the way, you know, he handled things or didn't do
28 something. But I definitely think more than one liaison officer for something this -- of

1 this magnitude definitely would help families. And -- yeah.

2 I mean, I just don't think the RCMP- ... -- I don't know. I don't know if
3 you want to hear my opinion on rural policing or not.

4 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Yes, we do.

5 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** I think the RCMP's just -- I think
6 they're outdated. I'm not going to lie. I think they're too far behind times on a lot of
7 things, technology, you know, members. I get rural policing is difficult, but I think -- I
8 think it's time that the RCMP steps aside and we get like a municipal or some stations in
9 there because three officers on duty for Colchester County's not very many. And
10 Colchester, you know, is huge and I think the people deserve just as much protection as
11 somebody in Halifax, as somebody in the rural community. And being an hour out, 45
12 minutes out to a call, especially an active shooter call, that's too long. It's too long.

13 So I think something needs to change there, whether it be the
14 RCMP, you know, update to, you know, 2022 instead of 1980, or sublet it out somehow
15 to other municipalities or start building a new force.

16 That's just -- that's my opinion. That's the way I looked at it. And
17 that's going back to, you know, the Justin Bourque (phonetic) days and the other ones
18 as well. It just seems like they can't handle anything that's catastrophic, that is big. And
19 it's unfortunate.

20 And I just want -- I don't want to see more people die. I'm very pro-
21 police, but I'm not pro-RCMP.

22 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you for your honesty. Thank you for
23 your time.

24 I'm going to just check in with the Commissioners and see if they
25 have any questions or any follow-ups for you.

26 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Yeah, definitely.

27 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Ryan, it's Michael MacDonald.
28 Thank you so much for -- I know you're not feeling well today and so my thanks is even

1 more appreciated for sharing your -- your suggestions with us and your experience with
2 us. And it's also more appreciated because it involves reliving, I'm sure, much of this
3 and so that's not easy.

4 I just want you to know how very sorry I am that you feel part of
5 your life was taken away and it's not lost on me.

6 And thank you, sir, for coming all the way from Ontario several
7 times. We see you in the hall and we thank you because it's a little bit of reliving as well
8 for you, I'm sure. Not a little bit, a lot. And so I'm just very appreciative. Very
9 appreciative that you -- you know, I'm sure on behalf of your family stepped up and are
10 stepping up and sharing your ideas with us and coming to Nova Scotia when you can.

11 And there's another train.

12 But I'm just -- and we all are just very appreciative for you being
13 here with us today, but for your support generally at the proceedings and generally. So
14 thank you very much, sir. I really, really appreciate it.

15 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** I appreciate that, and I'm thankful for
16 you guys having me. I was glad I was able to get up.

17 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Thank you.

18 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** Ryan, it's Commissioner Fitch, Leanne.

19 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Hi, Leanne. How are you?

20 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** Good, good.

21 Yeah, I just echo Michael's remarks. And I can't tell you how much
22 it meant not only to the three of us, but to all of our Commission team that, you know,
23 who's working at the convention centres and the hotels when family members are here
24 with us. You know, you may recall when we first met a long time ago now, we said that
25 meeting the family members early on in our proceedings really helped to centre us and
26 keep us grounded and focused on the heavy work that was ahead.

27 And to Michael's point, we recognize what a heavy ask it is for
28 family members to attend and how hard that must be. We can't even imagine that. But

1 I want to thank you for what you've done for all of the Commission team that has been
2 working on this and for us as well. Tremendous amount of courage to join us here
3 today again and speak from your heart and share your experiences and, you know, the
4 issues that you've raised for us are, you know, really on point and just again, thank you
5 very much.

6 And just wish you continued healing. I have to admit, it broke my
7 heart a little bit when I heard the train go by you said, "You know, I'm in the shed
8 because the kids would be screaming in the house". And it just -- just the reality of that,
9 though, and what people are going through showing up in person or showing up
10 virtually. And like the thought of you sitting out in your shed, yeah, touches my heart.

11 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Appreciate that.

12 And I mean, you know, the one thing that's hard is two of my kids
13 will never get to meet their grandparents. My other four from my previous marriage
14 were fortunate enough to spend years with them, but my two other ones were born after
15 -- after April of 2020.

16 So I appreciate that. Thank you.

17 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** It's Kim. And it's nice to see you
18 again.

19 And I -- even though you're not in the room each day, we know that
20 you are in the room each day. We do. And we do, as Michael and Leanne have said,
21 really appreciate that vigilance of yours and that care for the people that you're
22 connected with now through such a terrible set of circumstances.

23 And yeah, I mean, not getting that morning phone call or that
24 morning text, that's -- there's no way for your life to ever be the same, and -- and when
25 we talked to you the first time, I remember you talking about how you -- you know, how
26 you knew something was up because you hadn't heard from your mom yet.

27 And I -- yeah. I know that's hard.

28 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Thank you. I appreciate it.

1 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Yeah. We're very grateful to you for
2 being here and we know you're not well today, **C1**, my goodness.

3 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Yeah. Hopefully this is it.

4 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** I -- yeah, right. I mean, enough with
5 the character building (laughs).

6 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Thanks. Yeah.

7 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Fair enough.

8 Well, thank you very much for spending some time with us.

9 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Thank you guys. Thank you,
10 Commissioners. I appreciate it.

11 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** And thank you, counsel. Thank
12 you, Ms. McCulloch and thank you, Ms. MacCormick.

13 **MS. SANDRA McCULLOCH:** Thank you, Commissioners.

14 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Thank you.

15 **MS. GRACE MacCORMICK:** Thank you, Commissioners.

16 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Get some rest and feel better.

17 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Ryan, thank you. I just want to thank you.

18 **MR. RYAN FARRINGTON:** Bye now.

19 --- Session concludes

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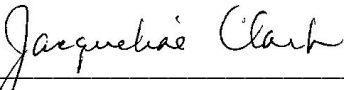
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CERTIFICATION

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