

## **Supporting Local Conversations During Heightened Public Attention**

### **Practical Messaging Support for Police Service Boards**

This document is intended to support police service boards if contacted by local media or community stakeholders following recent high-profile events involving policing elsewhere in Ontario.

It is not incident-specific and does not address the details of any ongoing investigation. Its purpose is to help boards communicate clearly, calmly, and within their governance role, while supporting public confidence and local police service members and staff.

#### **A few framing reminders**

- Events in one jurisdiction can prompt questions in others, even where there is no local connection.
- Boards are not expected to explain, defend, or comment on matters outside their authority.
- Calm, consistent language helps prevent unnecessary escalation or misinterpretation.

#### **What boards can say**

Boards may find it helpful to stay anchored in a small number of clear themes when responding locally.

#### **Acknowledge seriousness without amplifying it**

It is appropriate to recognize that events elsewhere are serious, without speculating or drawing conclusions.

#### **Possible language**

- “The issues being examined elsewhere are serious and understandably raise public concern.”
- “Accountability and public trust are essential to policing and police governance.”

#### **Clarify local context**

If there is no connection to the local police service or board, it is appropriate to state that clearly.

#### **Possible language**

- “There is no connection between those matters and our local police service.”
- “These events are specific to another jurisdiction.”

## **Reinforce confidence in independent oversight**

Boards may be asked about the role of independent oversight bodies, including the Inspectorate of Policing. It is appropriate to express confidence in the oversight framework and the importance of independent review.

Support for oversight does not involve commenting on investigations or outcomes. It reflects confidence in the system of accountability that exists to protect public trust.

### **Possible language**

- “Independent oversight is an essential part of maintaining public confidence in policing.”
- “Oversight bodies exist to independently examine serious matters when they arise.”
- “It’s important that oversight processes are allowed to proceed independently.”

## **Support local police service members and staff**

Sector-wide attention can place additional pressure on police service members and civilian staff who are not connected to the events prompting coverage.

Boards may acknowledge professionalism and service without minimizing the seriousness of matters elsewhere.

### **Possible language**

- “Our local police service members and staff continue to serve the community with professionalism and integrity.”
- “We are mindful that heightened attention can place added strain on police personnel who are not connected to these events.”

## **What boards should avoid saying**

Certain statements, even when well-intentioned, can create confusion or unintended risk.

### **Avoid speculation or commentary on investigations**

Boards should not comment on allegations, charges, evidence, or potential outcomes.

#### **Avoid**

- “It appears that...”
- “What likely happened is...”
- “This suggests that...”

#### **Instead**

- “It would not be appropriate for the board to comment on an ongoing investigation.”

### **Avoid minimizing or generalizing**

Downplaying seriousness or making broad claims about policing can undermine credibility.

#### **Avoid**

- “This is just an isolated issue.”
- “This doesn’t reflect any real problem.”
- “These things happen everywhere.”

#### **Instead**

- Focus on accountability, oversight, and local professionalism.

### **Avoid operational or investigative language**

Boards should not speak about discipline, internal controls, or operational processes.

#### **Avoid**

- “The board is taking action.”
- “We are reviewing officers.”
- “Leadership should have known.”

#### **Instead**

- Stay grounded in governance, accountability, and public confidence.

### **Avoid questioning the legitimacy of oversight**

Comments that second-guess or undermine oversight processes can erode trust.

#### **Avoid**

- “This is being overblown.”
- “Oversight bodies are getting involved too quickly.”
- “This should have been handled internally.”

#### **Instead**

- Reinforce respect for independent review and accountability frameworks.

## **If you are contacted by local media**

Boards may wish to:

- Identify who will respond on behalf of the board.
- Keep responses brief, factual, and measured.
- Use consistent language rather than improvised explanations.
- Redirect questions that fall outside the board's role.

It is always appropriate to say:

“That question relates to an ongoing investigation and is outside the board's role.”

## **Final note**

High-profile events can test public confidence across the policing sector, even when they are unrelated to local services. Boards that communicate calmly, avoid speculation, and reinforce accountability help steady local conversations and support confidence in their communities.

The Ontario Association of Police Service Boards will continue to monitor developments and share additional resources as appropriate.