

Return to Written Question

THE HONOURABLE LOUIS SEBERT
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Unfounded Sexual Assault Cases

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to the Written Question asked by Ms. Green on June 1, 2017 regarding unfounded sexual assault cases.

Mr. Speaker, senior members at G Division conducted a review of all unfounded sexual assault cases from 2010 to 2016, including the evidence in each case file. As I've reported to this Legislative Assembly previously, the review indicated that a number of cases were miscoded as unfounded in the last step of closing the file. This seems to have been a common issue across the country and data quality concerns about the imprecise use of this code instead of other options such as not cleared or unsubstantiated led Statistics Canada to stop analyzing its use several years ago.

The code is intended to indicate that a report has been fully investigated and that a crime did not occur or was not attempted. It does not indicate the way the case was investigated, only the way it was classified in the RCMP's internal computer system at the end of the investigation. The proportion of sexual assault complaints in the NWT deemed as unfounded after this review was reduced to 18.7%. Of these, 42% had been reported by a third party, meaning the report came from someone who had seen or been told something that led them to believe someone else had been sexually assaulted. Police would typically not contact a third-party complainant to

explain the reasons a case was coded in a particular way after the investigation concluded. A victim who reports an assault should always be kept aware of the progress and results of the investigation, and can contact the detachment at any time to speak with the member in charge of the file or the member's supervisor. During the file review initiated by G Division, there may have been instances where complainants were contacted by the investigating officer.

The significance of reporting that 42% of the unfounded sexual assault complaints were third-party complaints is only to provide some context to the statistics. These complaints are not first-hand from a victim of sexual assault, but by someone else who had seen or been told something that led them to believe a sexual assault has occurred.

The information from the review has been sent to National Headquarters, Ottawa, in order to help the RCMP to develop a force-wide response to the issue. At this time, I do not have any additional details on the review, including the results of the review in specific communities.

The RCMP has consulted with national and international law enforcement agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations and government partners regarding sexual assault' investigational practices, policy, training and public engagement. I have been informed that the RCMP will make clear recommendations to address gaps identified by the review and external consultations, in a report that will be made public.

Given the RCMP's unique jurisdictional mandate providing police services to provincial/territorial and municipal contracting partners, they must ensure that an

appropriate, coordinated national response is put in place, and I've been informed that this response is currently in the final stages of quality assurance.

I look forward to the RCMP's national response to this important issue, and to the recommendations regarding the organization's sexual assault investigational practices, policy, training and public engagement, and how that will impact policing in the NWT. In the meantime, Chief Superintendent Zettler has assured me that the RCMP have taken steps to ensure RCMP members are provided with everything they need to fully and properly investigate allegations of sexual assault, while remaining considerate and sensitive to the experience of the person coming forward. We all recognize that it is critical that everyone has confidence that when sexual assaults are reported, that they will be thoroughly investigated, with victims treated with care. The recent attention to how these investigations have been previously classified has highlighted and reinforced this concern.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.