



**Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of April 4th, 2024**

(time sensitive)

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: March 26th, 2024

From: Councillor Gardiner

Subject: Police School Liaison Officers and School District 61

BACKGROUND

There is clear evidence of increased gang activity in the City of Victoria with seven active street gangs in the Region. This evidence comes from VicPD Media Releases, presentations to Council, correspondence from the general public, and reports through the media.

In May of last year, the School District 61 (SD61) Board of Trustees removed School Liaison Officers from schools in the City of Victoria and other municipalities.

We have learned that increasingly, a primary target of gang activity has been our youth, with gang recruitment through schools.

In early March we heard of an arrest of a person who had been seen selling vape products to youth in two schools in the region and interacting with youth at a third school. Upon arrest, the police seized four imitation firearms, three knives and hundreds of nicotine and cannabis vapes. While vaping may not *sound* too serious, it is an enticement which draws vulnerable youth into criminal activity. Once recruited, the youth themselves become traffickers for the gang.

Premier Eby has stated the need to make sure *“that police do have access to schools”*. While the Premier and Public Safety Minister Mike Farnworth support police liaison programs, the decision to permit and invite programs in the schools belongs to each School District Board of Trustees.

The primary roles of a School Police Liaison Officer are education and to thwart criminal exploitation of our youth. Officers becoming familiar with each school, and its specific population of students, assist in building relationships: they become familiar people to talk to, especially for the more vulnerable youth. When a crime is committed and the Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) attends a school, the Police Liaison Officer serves as a bridge, transitioning trust to the MYST team.

Chief Manak has suggested that a reinstated modified School Police Liaison Officer program begin with guidance from a sub-committee including students, PAC and teacher representatives, school administrators, and police officers to identify any barriers which may exist for some students and to discuss ways to reduce trauma for those who may not feel comfortable in the presence of police.

Council has received a letter from the Mayor’s Office of the District of Saanich requesting the reinstatement of the Police School Liaison Officer program (attached). Victoria, with a quarter of the schools in School District No. 61, along with Saanich are host municipalities for more than half the SD61 schools.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council request the Mayor to write to the Chair of the Board of Education for School District 61 requesting reinstatement of the Police School Liaison Officers and that the letter be copied to the appropriate Provincial bodies, other School District 61 school hosting municipalities, and the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'G' followed by a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Councillor Gardiner