



**THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF SARNIA
City Clerk's Department**

255 Christina Street N. PO Box 3018
Sarnia ON Canada N7T 7N2
519-332-0330 (phone) 519-332-3995 (fax)
519-332-2664 (TTY)
www.sarnia.ca clerks@sarnia.ca

December 16, 2021

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

RE: "Catch and Release" Justice

At its meeting held on December 13, 2021, Sarnia City Council adopted the following resolution with respect to "Catch and Release Justice":

That the City of Sarnia send a letter to the Federal and Provincial Governments requesting meaningful improvements to the current state of "catch and release" justice in the Ontario legal system. Police Services across Ontario are exhausting precious time and resources having to manage the repeated arrests of the same offenders, which in turn, is impacting their morale, and ultimately law abiding citizens who are paying the often significant financial and emotional toll of this broken system. This resolution should also be sent to other Municipalities throughout Ontario for their endorsement consideration; and

That the request also be referred to the Sarnia Police Services Board and be presented via AMO delegations for endorsement consideration.

Your consideration of this matter is respectfully requested.

Yours sincerely,

Amy Burkhart
City Clerk

Cc: Bob Bailey, MPP
Marylyn Gladu, MP
All Ontario Municipalities



CHIEF OF POLICE REPORT

DATE: 19 January 2022

TO: Stratford Police Services Board

FROM: Deputy Chief Gerry Foster

RE: "Catch and Release Justice"

BACKGROUND

Council for the City of Sarnia has passed a resolution on December 13, 2021, requesting the Federal and Provincial governments consider making meaningful improvements to the release of offenders. The so-called "Catch and Release Justice" refers to the release of offenders by the courts whereby the offender is re-arrested by police for breaches of the release conditions.

The resolution indicates this approach has a negative impact on police workload, officer morale, and potentially law-abiding citizens.

Locally, council has asked that the matter be discussed at the Police Service Board level and that *"a review of 'catch and release justice' in the City of Stratford be referred to the Stratford Police Services Board to outline current challenges."*

Further, council is requesting a resolution with recommended changes be brought back to council for January 24, 2022.

ANALYSIS

On its surface "Catch and Release Justice" is a reference to the increase in offenders being released after being arrested. This term mostly refers to release by the courts although police officers (Officer in Charge) have release authorities similar to that of the court.

In response to the request of council, a review of charges laid for these instances was completed. Approximately 60 more charges were laid in 2021 in comparison to the average of charges from 2018 to 2020. In reviewing the data this increase would represent an approximate 43% increase

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in breach of release condition charges being laid by members of the service. I would caution that the data, while it does show an increase from 2018-2021, could also be indicative of the COVID pandemic whereby the courts (and police) were actively exploring opportunities to keep offenders out of custody, where possible. The result was that more offenders were released on conditions where re-offending in the community could have occurred. Likewise, the stressful nature of the pandemic should not be discounted as a contributing factor on this data.

RECOMMENDATIONS/COMMENTS

- The Stratford Police Service has experienced an increase in repeat offenders being released into the community only to re-offend.
- The impact of the pandemic on the police, justice and corrections system has been challenging to navigate
- More and more offenders are being released into the community on judicial release conditions that are continually breached leading to more arrests, charges, and court appearances.
- The community is frustrated with the lack of accountability on offenders and feel that their safety is being jeopardized.
- Police officers are resorting to “Officer in Charge” releases when offenders should be going to the courts for judicial releases because of workload.
- The court dockets will most likely be cleared of low-level offences resulting in no accountability for offenders
- Victims are feeling re-victimized by the system and losing faith/trust in the system.

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For Council consideration:

That that City of Stratford endorse the Sarnia Catch and Release Justice resolution and add the following:

- The Federal and Provincial Governments recognize the linkage between mental health, addiction, homelessness, and crime.
- That all levels of government acknowledge that catch and release justice contributes to feelings of vulnerability within our communities and increases the cost of policing, social services, and health care in our communities.
- That all levels of government provide continued financial support to enhance funding in communities for Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Teams, Overdose Response Teams, Community Outreach Teams, Emergency Shelter facilities, Education and Awareness Programs, diversion programs, etc. under the umbrella of Community Safety and Well Being.
- That the Federal and Provincial Governments re-imagine a direct accountability framework specific to charges relating to failure to comply with release conditions.
- That consideration be given to provided holistic support to chronic re-offenders experiencing mental health, addiction, and homelessness issues with a multi-disciplinary team under one roof

Yours,

Gerry Foster
Deputy Chief of Police