



hogan's alley society



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Human Rights Complainants Give New VPD Street Check Audit a Failing Grade in Annotated Response; Call on Vancouver Police Board to Ban Street Checks**

February 18, 2021, (X<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy̓əm (Musqueam), S<sup>k</sup>w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C – A coalition of organizations is giving the Vancouver Police Department's first annual audit of street checks a failing grade. The VPD audit is being presented to the Vancouver Police Board on Thursday February 18, 2021 at 1 pm.

The groups are releasing their [own annotated response](#) to the VPD Street Check Audit and the accompanying memo by the Vancouver Police Board Governance Committee, pointing out their many inaccuracies and concerns with the audit, available [here](#).

Hogan's Alley Society, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, WISH Drop-In Centre Society, and the BC Civil Liberties Association are also calling on the Vancouver Police Board to stop monitoring and regulating the practice of police street checks and to, instead, ban police street checks.

According to the coalition, “The VPD's first annual audit of street checks normalizes the practice of street checks. The issue is not whether there are 10 street checks or 10,000 street checks – the issue remains that there is no legal basis for street checks. Even according to the audit, street checks continue to disproportionately harm Indigenous and Black communities. In 2020, Black people were 1.0% of the city's population, but constituted 5.9% of all street checks; Indigenous people were 2.2% of the population in Vancouver, but constituted 15% of all street checks. The Police Board must ban the racist and illegal practice of street checks once and for all.”

The Vancouver Police Department's 2020 policy on “Conducting and Documenting Street Checks,” based on the Provincial Policing Standards on Police Stops, begins by stating: “When members are operating without lawful authority to detain or arrest, this policy provides direction to members with regards to the completion of a Street Check.” This statement acknowledges that police officers have no lawful authority under statute or common law to conduct street checks. The policy further defines street checks as “any voluntary interaction between a police officer and a person that is more than a casual conversation and which impedes the person's movement.” However, due to the inherent power imbalance between a police officer and a member of the public, people may feel they have no choice but to obey the police and are effectively detained—especially when the person stopped is racialized or is homeless.

Over 8,983 individuals on a [petition](#), 92 organizational signatories to an [open](#) letter, and a Vancouver City Council motion all call on the Vancouver Police Board to ban street checks.

## **MEDIA STATEMENTS:**

**Harsha Walia, Executive Director, BC Civil Liberties Association**, “The Vancouver Police Board is currently the [subject of a provincial review](#) for its gross mishandling of our policy complaint against street checks and its own street check review. Since the media leaked how the Vancouver Police Board authorized the censorship of details regarding racism and inappropriate behavior by VPD officers from their street check report, we have serious concerns about the Board’s governance capabilities and lack of independence from the VPD. The Police Board is supposed to provide independent and civilian oversight over the VPD, but they seem to take everything the VPD says about street checks at face-value. Street checks are not authorized by law and allow for illegal detentions, racism, and invasion of privacy; they must be banned.”

**Lama Mugabo, Director, Hogan’s Alley Society**, “We cannot rely on any of the VPD reports or even the Vancouver Police Board’s own street check review. All these studies say the same thing: that streets are valuable, even though there is no evidence for that claim. The studies also ridiculously suggest that there is no racism in street checks, even though all the data and our experiences are clear that street checks are harmful for Black, Indigenous and low-income communities. Our city must take immediate action to end the policing of marginalized communities. The Vancouver Police Board must ban racist street checks once and for all.”

**Mebrat Beyene, Executive Director, WISH Drop-In Centre Society**, “The VPD claims that street checks are not arbitrary or discriminatory and are apparently decreasing in number. But street-based sex workers continue to report being targeted by police for street checks. Street checks are, by their very nature, arbitrary because they are outside of an actual investigation and create a climate of criminalization and harassment for sex workers. Street-based sex workers report being followed, stopped, and questioned by police officers, which can push the trade further underground and jeopardize sex worker safety. Police street checks can make street-based sex workers even more vulnerable to risk of violence and exploitation, and must be banned.”

**Chief Don Tom, Vice President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs**, “Indigenous Nations are tired of going through these endless reviews and audits that all do nothing. Slapping ‘voluntary’ on a street check policy does not change the fact that it is threatening to be questioned by a person with a gun in a uniform. Indigenous people continue to experience institutional racism in the justice system and a high level of interaction with police, which is clearly and objectively furthered by street checks. It is unconscionable that despite all data and calls for accountability, the Police Board continues to support police authority to conduct street checks. In an era of reconciliation, this is simply unacceptable. The prohibition on street checks is long overdue.”

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[Annotated version of the VPD Street Check Audit.](#)