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CRIME

'Some problems': Report directs Halton Police to do more to address hate crimes in Oakville and Burlington as well as Milton and Halton Hills

By **David Lea** [InsideHalton.com](#)

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According to Statistics Canada, the number of police-reported hate crimes has increased by 72 per cent from 2019 to 2021. - Dreamstime



As part of this endeavour, Perry also interviewed Halton police staff and conducted extensive community consultations.

Her report was released to Halton police in late March 2023.



In her discussions before the board Perry noted that some officers clearly require additional training when it comes to hate crimes.

“We’re still seeing some problems in terms of understanding hate crimes, the legislation that surrounds it, how to identify hate crimes, what the indicators are,” said Perry. “I think there is also some resistance to the notion of a hate crime as something distinct. So, an assault that is motivated by hate some people will say, ‘It’s still an assault. What difference does it make what the motivation was?’ It makes a huge difference to the individuals and to the community and I think that is something that is still not being grasped by a number of officers.”

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Perry called for more opportunities for enhanced hate crime training for Halton police officers.

She also said Halton police need to heighten messaging that equity, diversity and inclusion and hate crime concerns are a “whole of the service” responsibility.

Another recommendation called for the creation of an integrated hate crime team that draws from officers across the service, including but not limited to the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion office, the Criminal Investigations Bureau, Intelligence and Victim Services.

Perry suggested that Halton police could work to overcome any prosecutorial issues regarding hate crimes by establishing a working relationship with the designated hate crime crown in Halton.

The biggest challenge for police, Perry said, will be dealing with what she called the "community trust deficit."

"There was a sense in the interviews and in the survey I did with community members that their voices are not always heard as a community or even as victims," said Perry. "People talked about their experiences being dismissed when they tried to report a hate crime. They were told they were overreacting or that the incident was just a joke or a prank. Minimizing the trauma, even for relatively minor incidents, can be traumatic and really damaging for individuals and communities."

She also called on police to expand public presentations with the aim of enhancing the community's understanding of hate crimes and the limits of hate crime legislation.

Perry further emphasized the need for Halton police to engage with the "critical voices" in the community and include these voices on the Diversity Advisory Committee and other similar bodies.

Sgt. Ryan Smith, Halton Police Equity, Diversity and Inclusion officer noted that while some of the things in Perry's report were hard to hear, steps have already been taken to act on her recommendations.

Some of this work includes:

- Adding three additional constables to the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion office so it can better deal with hate incidents.
- Providing mandatory hate crime training to all members of the Halton Police Service.
- Assigning hate crime co-ordinators with advanced hate crime training to each of Halton's three districts.

Smith said future initiatives would involve creating better co-ordination between the Halton police Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Office and Victim Services to better support victims of hate; and reaching out to Halton’s designated hate crime crown to discuss hate crime prosecution.

Halton police are also planning to hold a symposium on hate crimes for various community organizations in the near future and in late March they launched their #NoHateInHalton campaign in an effort to combat hate incidents and encourage residents to report these incidents when they happen.

When reached for comment Andrew Tyrrell, president of the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton, said Halton police need to be acknowledged for their transparency in having Perry review their policies and then making her report publicly available.

“It is rare that a police service will open up its policies and practices to be audited by an external party, risking exposing systemic issues that could be perceived as damaging to their reputation,” said Tyrrell.

“The fact that Halton police welcomed Dr. Perry for this evaluation and their willingness to implement key recommendations to improve their processes is commendable.”

Tyrrell said it is important that police officers receive additional training to prevent hate crimes from being minimized and treated as minor in the future.

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He also said it was positive that police recognize hate crimes are under reported and will be working with diverse communities so people feel comfortable talking to police about these incidents.

Tyrrell said his organization is encouraging police to look at hate crimes among different demographic groups uniquely noting the nature of the hate crime and the victim experience is different for Indigenous peoples, Blacks, Muslims, and other marginalized groups.

There is no shortage of reasons for Halton police to improve their response to these incidents.

Hate crimes are on the rise in Halton with police reporting 40 hate crime incidents in 2022 compared to 31 in 2021.

Deputy Chief Roger Wilkie said 29 of the 2022 hate crimes involved property damage/vandalism with hate-related slurs or symbols being spray-painted or scratched on public and private property.

Other incidents involved the theft of Pride flags.

The board voted to accept Perry's report.

They also directed police to report back on the progress of implementing Perry's recommendations in six months.

Perry herself was asked by the board to return in one year to determine the impact of her recommendations and if there is still room for improvement.



David Lea

David Lea is a general assignment reporter, covering news, municipal politics and crime for InsideHalton.com and its sister papers. He is the past recipient of the Ontario Community Newspaper Association's Reporter of the Year award. Reach him at dlea@metroland.com.

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