



MEDIA RELEASE

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: GOVERNMENTS MUST STEP UP TO END GROWING CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN BC COMMUNITIES

VANCOUVER, B.C. (October 30, 2023): British Columbia community and business groups, concerned citizens, and well-known BC retailers have come together to create **SOS: Save Our Streets**, a new public safety coalition demanding governments step up to end the growing crime and violence crisis in local communities across the province.

“Every British Columbian knows the escalation in crime and violence in our communities has reached epidemic proportions, and governments need to step up and do their jobs to make our streets safer,” said Clint Mahlman, President of London Drugs, and a founding member of SOS. “SOS is a broad and growing coalition committed to raising the alarm that our streets, our businesses, and our fellow British Columbians are at risk, and only governments, particularly the federal and provincial governments, have the resources, expertise, authority, and responsibility to change things for the better.

“Community groups and local businesses across the province have been expressing concern over the growth in violence against innocent victims for years and have been asking government leaders to do something to protect citizens and their streets. Governments at all levels have responded in piecemeal fashion but are not acting in unison or with any sense of urgency as street-level problems continue to grow. SOS says the current approach of government is not working, and streets and communities are becoming more unsafe.”

In addition to attacks on innocent victims, SOS members say retailers across BC are facing growing amounts of theft which impact prices and local shoppers. SOS says absorbing the cost of retail theft and more security is costing BC families \$500 annually.

In addition to increasing awareness, and highlighting issues and incidents of crime, SOS wants to establish a set of measurable results that provide British Columbians with statistical evidence that show whether streets and communities are getting safer or not.

“We’re at the point where words don’t mean much,” added Mahlman. “We want to see measurable results that are shared with British Columbians. There’s an urgency that all of us see at street level, and we need governments to recognize the urgency and get to work.

When neighbourhoods and businesses see theft, vandalism and violent crimes being repeated by the same people, over and over, we know the system isn't working and innocent British Columbians and neighbourhood businesses are victimized and paying the price."

Karen Kuwica of the Nanaimo Area Public Safety Association says communities across the province experiencing these same issues can be assured that the coalition shares their concerns and welcomes them.

"The crimes and violence we're talking about aren't limited to Vancouver or the Lower Mainland, they are right across our province, every community is feeling it, and now we have the chance to speak up together," said Kuwica. "In Nanaimo, we have been actively raising these issues and asking for help for some time. From that we know, it's going to take decisive action from all levels of government to restore civil society and solve these complex problems."

Linda Annis, Executive Director of Metro Vancouver Crime Stoppers, and a city councillor in Surrey, says the SOS network across the province reinforces how widespread the issues are.

"People are afraid, and they're frustrated," noted Annis. "The SOS coalition means a louder voice for communities, one that is hopefully heard by our politicians who have the authority, resources, and responsibility to make these issues a priority. After all, when your streets and neighbourhoods aren't safe nothing else matters."

Tanya Finley of the Nelson Neighbourhood Network says, "SOS is a widely recognized signal of distress and a cry for help. Our coalition of concerned citizens and businesses from around B.C. is dedicated to delivering that message. The issues are real and growing, and only government has the capacity and legal authority to do what's needed right now. The issues are well-known, and it is time for solutions."

What must be done:

- Governments cannot succeed by addressing singular aspects of the issue such as decriminalization of drugs, policing resources, homelessness, mental health services, or judicial reform. A comprehensive approach by all governments is required.
- British Columbians should continue to reach out to their MLAs and MPs, demanding action to keep communities safe.
- Action now is critical. Staff safety, skyrocketing costs for security, and impacts of theft have neighbourhood businesses questioning the viability of staying in business or moving and putting local jobs at risk.

ABOUT SOS

Communities, citizen groups, and BC businesses interested in joining SOS are invited to contact: info@saveourstreets.ca.

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BACKGROUND

“SAVE OUR STREETS” FOUNDING MEMBERS

SOS is a growing movement of concerned citizens groups, associations, and businesses from throughout B.C.

Aritzia	Metro Vancouver Crime Stoppers
Bay Centre Victoria	Nanaimo Area Public Safety Association
BC Restaurant and Foodservices Association	Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce
Chilliwack Beware Crime and Safety	Nelson Neighbourhood Network
Citizens Take Action (Dawson Creek/Ft. St. John)	Pacific Reach Properties
Clean Streets Penticton	Purdy’s Chocolatier
Clean Up V9L (Duncan)	Restaurants Canada
Convenience Industry Council of Canada	Retail Council of Canada
Downtown Nanaimo Business Association	Rexall
Downtown Victoria Business Association	Safer Vancouver
Georgia Main Food Group	Save-On-Foods/Pattison Food Group
Greater Vancouver Board of Trade	Save Our City Vancouver
Kamloops Citizens for Change	Securiguard
London Drugs	7-Eleven Canada
Lululemon	Surrey Board of Trade
Marquis Wine	Victoria Crescent Association (Nanaimo)
MEC Mountain Equipment Company	