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New Model Sees DNA Analysis Bill Land in Local Government Laps

In yet another case of downloading, municipalities around the province are now on the hook for DNA testing services conducted by local RCMP. In 2013, the federal government advised the provincial and territorial governments that it wished to revise the current funding model. The resulting model sees the federal government pay 54% of DNA testing costs and the provinces/territories paying 46%. Local governments in BC were not notified how the Province would fund the majority of its new costs until bills were sent out to communities.

In a letter to Justice Minister Suzanne Anton, Union of B.C. Municipalities' President & Chair of the Cariboo Regional District, Al Richmond, wrote, "While all provinces and territories are now faced with the same cost pressures related to DNA analysis services, I am not aware of any other province, other than British Columbia, that is shifting a portion of these costs to local government."

"The Province will cover municipalities with populations under 5 000, but larger cities across BC now have to provide the remaining \$2.90 million for 2016/17," says NCLGA President Brian Frenkel. "There was no consultation with UBCM, or any of the 5 local government associations."

Prince George, the NCLGA's largest member, is expected to receive a bill for approximately \$51,876.95 for the 2016/17 fiscal year. Similarly, Prince Rupert expects new services to cost the city \$26,361.17 and Dawson Creek is looking at a bill for \$25,954.05.

Concerns have been raised about the future of crime reduction in municipalities who can no longer afford DNA testing services. "What I think we're going to see here is a backlog of samples. I'm worried that DNA will get collected at crime scenes, but will only be selectively tested because of the financial burden it places on the municipalities," says Shaely Wilbur, councillor for the City of Dawson Creek and NCLGA Second Vice President. "We could, potentially, lose one of the most useful tools in crime conviction."

"I understand money is tight everywhere, but this is just a distortion of the system so that the provincial and federal governments can claim they've 'balanced the budget'," says President Frenkel. "We firmly stand behind UBCM's position calling on the Province to roll back the decision and open up the floor for discussion. There's a solution in this that can work for all of us."

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