

# Devolution of SAPS will lead to safer communities

By Michael Shackleton – DA Gauteng Shadow MEC for Community Safety

Honourable Chairperson,  
Honourable Minister and Deputy Minister,  
Honourable Premiers,  
Honourable Members, and  
Fellow South Africans,  
Good afternoon

It is a privilege to speak in this Chamber as a special delegate from the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.

More now than ever, and especially following the violent unrest experienced in July, this country needs solutions when it comes to policing.

The devolution of police control to allow for provincial police forces, allows for a differentiated approach and for decision-making to take place as close to the ground as possible; where things happen.

*According to the Institute for Security Studies, "Police numbers will drop by a sizable 24 000 posts over the next three years due to public sector budget cuts. The impact will be acute at station level, with nearly 2 000 fewer detectives and 11 000 fewer visible police officials. Yet only 15 posts will be lost at the top level of general and brigadier. This means the expensive and ineffective senior management structure largely remains while thousands of operational posts are slashed."*

This country needs to be saved from national government. If we were to have provincial police services – not a police force, a service – we would be in a position where we don't have to let the citizens of our beautiful country be victims of poor decision-making and the questionable allocation of resources.

If we were to have provincial police services, we can make relatively obvious decisions. Every police station in Gauteng complains about a lack of vehicles because it takes many months to get a vehicle back for simple repair work. We all take our own vehicles into local mechanics and dealerships and it really isn't rocket science to allow the police to make localized decisions where they can drive or tow damaged vehicles to repair shops that have a quick turnaround time.

Police stations should be able to hire and interview people for vacant positions. The current extensive bureaucratic setup is causing staff shortages in all police stations in Gauteng that I have ever visited.

A few examples of resourcing of the SAPS in Gauteng includes that:

- 54% of the flying squad vehicles in the province are out of service;
- In April 2021, I exposed that 2 170 police vehicles were out of service in the province; and
- In May 2021, I exposed that the Gauteng SAPS Air Wing only has 1 helicopter in service.

The people of this country don't have to be victims to this. Through effective and clean governance at provincial level – like in the Western Cape – budgets can work to alleviate this highly problematic situation once SAPS is placed under the control of competent provinces.

In Gauteng, I am the sponsor of a Community Safety Oversight Bill in the legislature which seeks to emulate the Western Cape's approach by:

- Calling for a provincial advisory committee to be put in place to advise the MEC. SAPS complained of a lack of sufficient intelligence in the case of the violent unrest. What happens in the Western Cape is that a provincial advisory committee consisting of representatives from across all sectors of society – including legal, NGOs, business, security companies and CPFs – brief the MEC for Community Safety on a regular basis, providing him real intelligence from the ground. We need this in Gauteng, and all of South Africa needs this;
- It also calls for the establishment of a Provincial Police Ombudsman which the public can report police inefficiencies too. This is not like IPID which addresses police brutality and is savagely under-resourced. It is not a duplication of roles. We did see police inefficiencies during the unrest such as people escaping arrest and people complain about a lack of service from the SAPS all the time. It is not our intention to work against SAPS but rather with them, to root out corruption and inefficiencies and to give citizens of our country the safety, security and dignity that they deserve;
- The Bill also provides for the accreditation of neighbourhood watches. We all saw the role that private citizens played during the violent unrest and ordinary people need to be roped in; in a responsible and reasonable manner when it comes to fighting crime. There are not enough police officers in South Africa. According to 2019 and 2020 studies, there are 498 435 private security officers in South Africa versus 160 000 SAPS officers and an estimated complement of 192 777 across the entire SAPS. There are real stories within SAPS where the police patrol all night, without rest, in 1 vehicle in a community and get back to find pages of complaints as to the matters that they could not attend to. These matters could be resolved if we help people to get trained and accredited to serve their communities.

Imagine what competent provinces with bold new ideas could do if the SAPS was placed fully under provincial control. These are only some of the examples where a competent province like the Western Cape are doing things differently and are doing them right. Only the DA gets things done. No-one can have freedom while they live in fear.

I thank you.