British Columbia's
Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

Inquiry into hate in the pandemic: Hearing transcript

Transcription prepared by BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

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Presenting organizations: Daniel Gallant Law Corporation

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BCOHRC[1] attendees: Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender, Sarah Khan, Carly Hyman

Please note that third-party personal information has been removed from this transcript.

[Introductory comments by Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender not included in transcript.]

Daniel Gallant: Thank you, Commissioner. So I'm located on unceded Dakelh territory in Prince George. I appreciate being invited and having this opportunity to share my perspective with you. As you noted, my background includes having participated as a perpetrator of hate for… I'll call it a span of about eight years, throughout Alberta and BC. Starting in Vancouver and moving upwards to Northern BC, and then also in the Edmonton area as well. At the time that I entered into that world, was around 1994-1995, so the internet was just gaining foot. So just for context of that timeframe.

I do also just want to note for your reference that I am a lawyer in BC, and I am a registered social worker in BC. My education history is a Bachelor of First Nations Studies, a Master's of Social Work, and a Juris Doctor degree, all from BC. I've had the opportunity to participate in what I'll refer to as seminal public resources for educators, which was a project called Extreme Dialogue funded by the federal government with an NGO, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue out of the UK. And that platform engaged with different people who were affected by incidents of extremism or terrorism including hate, right-wing extremism specifically.

That got implemented into many school systems around the world in different countries, and I think it has been translated into five languages throughout the European countries. Nonetheless, I was part of the steering committee that developed that whole project. There were other stakeholders including RCMPs, a CSIS member, Public Safety Canada and so forth, with community input as well. For context I say that. Also for context of my perspective and the lens that I apply in even reflecting back on my own experiences, my

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Master's thesis, which focused on disengagement and deradicalization from right-wing extremism, which was in part funded by Public Safety as well, and looking at themes of disengagement amongst different former extremists.

So I could go on about the work that I've done. The point that I'm trying to get across is that I have been engaged in prevention work. Now, stepping outside of some of the more formal opportunities I've had the privilege of participating in, I've engaged in intervention of extremist recruitment, and doing that on an ad hoc basis on my own as an individual. That shifted once I got put in contact with Google Ideas, and then I was introduced to a whole new world when I was invited to a Google Summit in New York City to present some thinktank labs to investigators within US Department of State, Pentagon, and other organizations with the government there.

So that kind of shifted how I was interacting with extremists that were active. For a while, I had a blog that highlighted incidents of hate locally in the Prince George area. It was actually that blog where I was doing that, which was similar but different to Anti-Racist Canada, which was a blog that did it nationwide, but they did more specifics, and profiling and identifying links between people, and became a source for law enforcement investigators around the country. So kind of similar to that work.

So I'm going to give you a little anecdotal piece here that flowed from that, that was at the time I was doing my Master's and had just finished writing my thesis. I was highlighting a local gun store that was ran by a proponent of Nazism, and it turned out that he was a retired auxiliary member of the RCMP. Then there was another retired RCMP member that was espousing some pretty hateful things against Indigenous people. And I stepped into that mix of deconstructing and challenging. I ran into some friction with the local law enforcement detachment. I had a meeting with them at the university, and they wanted my activism to stop. They went to the chair of our social work program and had a discussion with her, and pulled me into the office to have a firm discussion that I needed to stop.

And it surprised me because these were activists by nature, but sometimes political pressures stop or interrupt. Nonetheless, I sat down with them. The short of it all was that the police didn't like my roundabout way of getting some attention on the matter when I received resistance from the local detachment, and I was threatened with some criminal charges. It was that day that I decided to go to law school. It was for that reason.

Commissioner, I had, on numerous occasions, hurt a lot of people. That's a fact. I've done everything I can at all levels, up to the United Nations level with UNESCO of participating in discussions around policy and so forth and prevention. And in this work I am very disappointed with some of the responses to that work and the resistance from certain institutions. And it's my view that the direction you're going and what you're looking into is extremely important. And I get that you're limited to the scope of your powers as outlined in the Human Rights Code, but some of the things I would like to highlight, I think contextually apply.

Now, before I go into a short tangent of things and issues, I want to address some of your questions specifically. So as I stated, when I was recruited into the white supremacist movement, it was shortly after I had spent what the media referred to as a "native youth gang" that I was in for quite some time in northern BC, as I lived on and around a reserve with my grandma who's Cree and Saulteaux. For a time being when I was young, I believed that my father was Indigenous, and that's who I was. Later in life it

turned out that that biological link did not exist. But for the context of who I am, my kookum is [**Third party personal information removed]**.

One of the key catalysts for change was this time when I returned back to Chetwynd from East Vancouver after being recruited and being introduced to the internet and engaging with people all over Western Canada, which was at a time after the Heritage Front was dismantled in Toronto by what became the Grant Bristow scandal, if you will, as some people would put it, by a CSIS agent or operative... Lacking the technical term of what the role was, but he was involved with CSIS.

Nonetheless, a bunch of those people moved out West and that's where I got linked up. I had returned to Chetwynd, I had seen my kookum, and she was aware of some of the stuff that was going on. And it took some time for this to sink in, but I seen her, and she just said, **[Third party personal information removed]**

It took some time for that incident to sink in. I went through a few other personal dilemmas, which I've outlined many times before, but to summarize it, it was the birth of my son, some childhood flashbacks of watching **[Third party personal information removed]** get abused in a significant way, and 9/11 occurred all in the same time frame. And so I somewhat woke up to some of the realities of my own behaviour and incongruences of values and actions and that sort of thing. And then I quit drugs and alcohol, which also helped gain some clarity. And we know during that pandemic that there's heightened addictions issues and mental health issues, right? So that I think is very important.

So my grandma was very influential over the course of a couple years. I reconnected, I built a stronger bond there than I ever had, even when I was young and living there. So those are some of the elements of the transition out. And I don't like the word rehabilitation for my case, because I never really had anything to be rehabilitated to. So that's a point just to mention.

So when I was looking for directions and help on how to live, they weren't there. I was turned away from counsellors repeatedly. Fortunately, the first counsellor I went to was able to work with me despite being horrified by some of the stuff going on. Counsellors were not equipped with how to handle the realities of someone who was on such a violent path and looking for a way out. People just don't know how to cope with that. So that was an issue. Nonetheless, I gained some healing through a combination of happenstance and circumstances, which included the Red Road Ceremony and healing from Cree cultural ceremonies in BC and Alberta. Fortunately, I had some pretty good connections from when I was young that circled around into ceremony.

I also sought an education, and my purpose for going into university was after a counsellor had said to me that… He offered me a challenge and said, "You might want to consider going into women's studies or social work to challenge yourself, because you're a smart guy, you just got some pretty far out there ideas." So that was why I started education. So I came to a spot where I decided that I was going to challenge everything and I was going to work through everything.

It took me eight years to do my undergraduate degree throughout five universities, to work through some of this stuff, the indoctrination piece. I successfully did so. And the Master's was kind of an accumulation of all that I had experienced and put it in a package. My intention was, when I was accepted, to do a PhD in Perth, putting it all together and developing a new modality for disengagement and deradicalization. The reason I didn't do that is what I spoke to earlier, I didn't have the best interaction with the RCMP and I

decided that I was going to get my hands into muck and do what I can to positively affect and contribute to change in the communities where I'm from.

So that's why I'm in the north, part of the reason why. I love the north. But nonetheless, that is some of the context of the change in resources. So my direction with intervention and prevention has been influenced by that, and there are resources available now all over Canada, not locally to where we are, but there are organizations that I can connect people with and do.

And so I'm no longer actively doing that work, and as I pursued law I'm not doing a lot of intervention work, but I still engage in some. Some of the anecdotal pieces of that were highlighted in my paper that I was commissioned to write for UNESCO that I had provided to your office. Yeah.

So I'm going to quickly go to your second question, which is, "What leads people to perpetuate hate?" I've got two responses. One's direct to that question, and one's not. One is that there's many things that lead people to hate, it often has something to do with valid grievances. And valid grievances then, as we know, ideology and people's thoughts are flexible and can often become emotionally driven. And a lot of the hate messaging, conspiracy theories, the doctrines of specific organizations or networks that are some of the propaganda templates, those in my experience, from my perspective, all operate on partial logic and emotionally driven, and then flexing the two to meet a political end.

And that I think is an important feature when approaching these organizations, these networks, and these individuals. Because there's weak points in that link of worldview, and that's the emotionally driven portions that are not logical and cannot stand to the test of reasoning. And I go into some of that in my thesis, which is quite verbose, so I'm not going to that. I can be verbose.

The other answer I have on this is, when we're looking at this question in the context of the pandemic, people are more isolated, we know that, not able to engage with their normal social activities. It appears that people are more reliant on the internet. And what we keep hearing about from experts and media and government is internet, internet, internet. What we don't hear about is the approach, and how we're going to develop mechanisms to regulate or to at least provide some mechanisms.

And I understand that you have a limited role in the scope of the Code, however, as a legal practitioner in the area of discrimination under the *Human Rights Code*, I can tell you that there are some very clear challenges. And I want to get into that, but I want to finish the answer to this question, right? They're linked together, so I don't want to get too lost down the other avenue without finalizing my not-so-direct answer. The people that are perpetrating hate that I see in public, on the internet, in real time, are not Nazis, typically. They are not national socialist. Some ascribe to some white nationalism, different labels and titles, you could lump them in as right-wing extremist, whatever. But a lot of them are tradespeople and people who are just regular citizens in a way.

And so this leads to two further points. One is being a white guy with the history that I have as a perpetrator, and I've covered up most of my tattoos so it's not visible, but I'm visible. People feel rather safe in espousing crazy stuff, and people you would not suspect should be. And despite my public profile of being against that stuff now, people still feel compelled to express views. I think I hear a lot more of it because of who I am and my social position, a white guy in Canadian society.

Pioneers, pioneer communities are riddled with anti-Semitism. Institutions, whether that's… Let me say this so it doesn't sound like a collateral attack, it's more anecdotal. I've had discussions with a federal politician, with a provincial politician, multiple law enforcement officers from a variety of different agencies, in the past when I was an active white supremacist, that were sympathetic. And much of them had stated explicitly, "The only thing that separates us is you're violent, I'm not."

Okay? So that's a problem. But the point being, that attitude is in our institutions, that attitude is rooted in our law. Specifically, and I'll just name it for the sake of clarity, the *Indian Act*. There's been some reparations where it's found to be discriminatory against Indigenous people, but particularly Indigenous women, and the public narrative is that's no longer discriminatory, which is untrue. And it didn't fix any of the problem, it just extended some of the life of Indigenous women being able to hold onto their Indian citizenship. So I'm just putting context there for this purpose.

And then the pioneer communities. The pioneer communities echo what's already there in our institutions and in our law. And so this is the answer that I was trying to get to, is this isn't new. This is everywhere, and it has been for the entirety of my life. As a white guy who thought he was Indigenous and then found out he wasn't, and having the ability and the privilege to end up being… And I refer to it as a privilege, not saying that I'm glad that it occurred, but the privilege for me to go to extreme criminal behaviour, extremist behaviour, and then to be able to come out and be where I am now, is because of my location, my social location.

Had I been Indigenous, had I been a Muslim extremist, this may not have been as plausible of an outcome. Because when I came up out of this stuff, there was no attention on the right wing. There was no common articulation in the media or government other than hate crimes in the *Criminal Code*, which are an extremely difficult and taxing process and area of law, and expensive, and some human rights protections, but this stuff is… It's everywhere, it's just being talked about openly now.

And I think the pandemic along with a couple other pieces like s. 13 of the *Human Rights Act,* the federal legislation being repealed, which is now maybe coming back into play, once that was repealed people got away with a lot more. I just noticed a chat message, so…

Kasari Govender: Do you want to move to questions, Daniel? Excuse me, or was there something else you'd like to say before that?

Daniel Gallant: Yeah, what I'll say quickly is that some of the challenges that I faced as a legal practitioner in regards to discrimination complaints. The system's backed up. What I've been told is because of the complaints that have come up since the pandemic. And of course I'm not privy to what those complaints are or whether they're valid or not, or what's occurred, but I can tell you that access to justice for victims of hateful incidents is not available currently.

What was taking six months to a year in procedure prior to the pandemic, we're now told are 300% longer. And an application to dismiss is a year and a half for a decision, is unfortunate. Because human rights is compensatory in nature and it's distinguished from criminal or the civil, which includes things like the *Civil Rights Protection Act*, which is civil and an offence piece, which access to justice for those processes are extremely challenging, but human rights has… We have an organization that does human rights actions for people, a class, but they're limited. They're one office in Vancouver.

Northerners often don't have that recourse, and for people who experience hate in the north there's often no option except hiring counsel and pursuing a human rights complaint when they can. Now, there's gaps in human rights legislation, we don't have time to do that today, but I've identified a few, and they're concerning.

So I'm going to wrap up my portion here by saying that in my view, it's ironic, it's sad, and it's frustrating that the Canadian federal government, the provincial government of BC, and our institutions therefrom, both national and provincial, are asking citizens to not be hateful and extreme. But when you have a system that imposes different standards for different classes of people, when you have a system that is engaged with racial discrimination, and because of the way the law works and the *Indian Act* isn't limited to just the federal government, it comes into provincial legislation. We have jurisdictional disputes between provincial and federal for the caring of Indigenous children, Cindy Blackstock's work. We have all these things that are real and alive.

How can we, as a society, be told to behave in a certain way when the system isn't doing the same? To me, it needs to be congruent. That by no means gives an escape route in my reasoning in saying, "Well, you know, since the government's discriminatory, so can you be." That's not my point. The point is there's a lot of structural work that can be done, and I think that has to be done not before we ask people to be better, but they have to align. You can't hold others more accountable than the government and ask people to beat the government to the race, to the finish line. It doesn't make sense to me.

So I think that's an issue, and in context of human rights, I think that we as a province have to do better than we are in dealing with complaints that are coming forward. Not suggesting that the Tribunal or the Commissioner's Office by any means is engaged in the same acts as falling under the *Indian Act,* because that's clearly not the case. But when an individual from our communities is stifled or prevented from getting justice in a timely manner, it compounds those already existing realities that individual has to live with.

Kasari Govender: Thank you so much, Daniel. That was really useful, to hear some of your story and some of the learnings that you've had in that process. There were a few pieces, a few of my questions were around different aspects that you may have experienced and how you see that contributing to hate, either in your own story or more broadly.

So one of those was the role… **[Third party personal information removed]** Or more generally, if you have thoughts of those that you've worked with of how gender-based violence in the home or in their young life might have contributed to their views later on.

Daniel Gallant: Absolutely. First thing I'll say, that while in the white supremacist movement getting to know quite a few people in there, lots come from some pretty traumatic backgrounds. But I would say it's probably a quarter of the people that I knew came from super privileged and no sign of any of that. So it's a mixed bag in that regard.

Kasari Govender: Interesting.

Daniel Gallant: So that's just point one. Now, specifically the question… So I witnessed **[Third party personal information removed]** get hit and slapped around quite abit. Once I had that flashback, I woke up

to the reality that I was hating… This was my awakening moment, and it was limited to the spot where I was mentally, spiritually, emotionally at that time. So it's a bit rough.

I was hating a bunch of people that I was like. So I found a commonality in what the people I was hating and targeting, in my mind what they represented, and it was everything that I went through. Right? It was fear-based. So that means that for me, that the **[Third party personal information removed]** was hugely a part of my trajectory.

In addition to that, when I look at my recovery and my healing, I was looking for ways to seek justice. There was no access to justice. I must have contacted 30 law firms trying to talk to someone, couldn't find anyone to talk to to hold this guy accountable. I talked to the police, they didn't care.

I talked to the local detachment, to cops that I knew, and I came forward with information a few years into my recovery about a bombing by a white nationalist, a guy that I actually recruited in northern BC. He got convicted. He was subsequently convicted of a second explosives charge, okay? Never terrorism, never nothing like that. That's a whole different bag, but white nationalist nonetheless.

So I talked to the officers that I was dealing with at that time about the perpetrator of the violence **[Third party personal information removed]** that I witnessed. Nothing. Right? That rendered me feeling helpless. So the day I decided to apply to law school, I actually also reconciled that maybe law will get me some justice.

So what I did after I was called to the bar, I filed a lawsuit for **[Third party personal information removed]**, but my understanding is the Crown doesn't feel that it's worth pursuing.

So if I look at that, if I didn't have the skillset I have and the knowledge and lived experience I have now, it would be very hurtful and render me feeling powerless and helpless. And when you render a whole bunch of people that way, it can have some sideways effects. And I think we're seeing some of the results of those things, because trauma does impact mental health, mental health does impact the way you think, and if you're on the internet because you're isolated and you're buying into… I'll go to maybe not the… It does apply in BC, the QAnon conspiracy. I can understand how people get there with that line.

And that's just one type of person that may go down that avenue. And I've witnessed it. I have older children who have friends. I've had these conversations. I've spent hours unpacking this stuff with kids who have been through some stuff. So, yeah. I do think that it affects it, but I don't think it's the whole extent of all the people who are susceptible by any means.

Kasari Govender: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think you've touched on a number of factors that both contributed in your experience but also those around you to the violence and the ideology. Maybe I'll put these together. Two of the other factors I was wondering if you could speak to were self-esteem issues for young men, perhaps, or people in general, but certainly something that we've seen starting to emerge from the research and I'm just curious if you could speak to that.

Also, I know you were engaged in the Child Protection System as a child, what role that might have had. And then maybe I'll just wrap this up together because I know we're coming to the end, you said gender-based violence has a role to play, but it's certainly not for everybody. Is there anything that you would say is a factor across the board? Is there any unifying factor of what leads people to this behaviour?

Daniel Gallant: Yeah, so I would say that the unifying factor is that there is not enough critical thinking or logic testing that is taught. Ideology is flexible, as I said. Emotions run high, people don't think right. And I think across the board, no matter what class you're from, I think there's something there in regards to education and prevention.

And it comes down to simple things. And one example, simple things like, I'm reading this on the internet, what's the source, where is that source getting their information, and where are other sources and what do those sources say? When you teach a generation to do that, you're going to see huge institutional changes as well. And that may not be an attractive feature for some.

Now, your question. I was involved with the system when I was young as a result of coming out of a couple year sentence as a youth, which fell under Child Family Development, I think it was called at that time, but MCFD basically. And in that time I was placed with a family for six months. The impact that that family had on me long term, huge. Once I was starting to come out of the fog, right, so retrospectively, it was the only home I ever lived in that was OK. So it's given me a root now on this end because I have them in my life, but that wasn't true for a long time, and it didn't faze on me until I was ready.

Now there's one point further to say about the child protection in my personal experience, was when I was going through abuses at home with another stepdad that were directed at me, going to school with black eyes and bruised ribs and that sort of thing, back then they didn't care. Police got called, whatever the police said the social workers went with. So it didn't go anywhere. So after talking to a teacher, I went to the streets. I left home very early. I was officially gone prior to being 13, just prior.

But anyways. So that did contribute, and I'll say as a legal practitioner in doing a lot of MCFD work that when… I don't need to go into the details, I don't think, because I know some of the people in your office are well-versed with all this, and that you would have access to that information. But Indigenous children. And that's all I need to say on that, Indigenous children in care. And I'll say that also newer immigrants, newer citizens, newer members of our country from other countries also face challenges with social work practitioners.

It's my view that… And I can't go into details, but I can say that I've come across incidences where what's being said I think is discriminatory. The standards that are being applied to people of particular religions. And I don't think it's right, and I think that protections are being overstepped. And what protections does a citizen have? The legal system. And do they have access to justice? Likely not. So that's a challenge.

And I realize we're probably out of time, but there's professional standards, industry social workers aren't registered social workers, there's a whole thing there about ethical obligations and discrimination specifically. So there's some conversations to be had in that regard that I think affect what's being… What happens in our institutions happens on our streets, and how a person feels when they interact with an institution, if they're being discriminated there, and then they go out into the community and then they're called names there when they're already hearing the same messaging from an institution, is a sad reality.

Kasari Govender: Well, Daniel, we are out of time, and again I've been really appreciative of what you've shared with us and what we've learned from you today. My last question is just something that I'll leave with you in hopes that you might consider putting in some written submissions of whatever depth makes sense. And obviously no obligation, but it would be great to hear. You mentioned that you saw some gaps in human rights legislation, and it's certainly something that we'll be turning our mind to. As a lawyer and

as somebody with the kind of experience that you've talked about today, we'd be very curious to hear more about your thoughts on that.

And certainly anything you'd like to add in terms of anything we've talked about today or the questions that we've had here today. With that, I will just say again how useful it's been and pass it over to Emily to wrap us up today.

Daniel Gallant: Thank you, Commissioner.

Emily Chan: Thank you. I have just a couple of notes here to close off, mostly around next steps from here, Daniel. So one is, as the Commissioner mentioned, written and video submissions are open. The date for that is March 31st of this year. So if you did want to follow up with any written submissions or if you know anyone that would like to, that's the date for that, and let me know if you have any questions about that by email.

Also I see that you did consent to posting a recording online, so once that recording's ready to be posted we'll notify everyone who presented. So if you wanted to review it before we post it, you're welcome and able to do that.

And finally and most importantly, thank you so much for sharing and taking the time. Especially sharing so much of your personal experience, it was really powerful to hear, and really appreciate you taking the time to do that. So thank you again so much.

Daniel Gallant: Thank you for the opportunity.

Kasari Govender: Take care, Daniel.

Sarah Khan: Thank you so much.

Carly Hyman: Thanks, Daniel.

Daniel Gallant: Bye-bye.