



*“Dedicated to Justice” • «Au service de la justice»*

September 19, 2013

The Honourable Steven Blaney  
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. We would also like to introduce our agency to you so that you are familiar with our work on behalf of persons harmed by crime and violence in Canada. The CRCVC is a national, non-profit advocacy group for victims and survivors of serious crime. We work to ensure the needs of survivors are met by various criminal justice agencies, with a particular focus on the federal corrections and parole system. We would like to make you aware of our continued priorities and hope will be able to address these important issues during the upcoming session of Parliament:

**1. Corrections and parole:**

- a. We believe victims should be informed when their offender has been deported from Canada. This is not a current practice.
- b. Electronic notification system for victims - We would like to see an electronic notification system for victims registered with Correctional Services Canada and Parole Board Canada similar to what is currently offered in the United States. A web portal would allow victims to login and access information about their offender in a manner more sensitive to their individual schedules, as government office hours impose restrictions on access to information. We believe offering electronic notification to victims will also allow CSC/PBC to reach a broader audience and strengthen the privacy of notifications, as breaches can occur when multiple victims are receiving notifications regarding one offender. Accessing files electronically will also simplify paperwork for victims who will be able to save documents on their computers instead of keeping a physical file in their homes.
- c. We feel that Statutory Release must be abolished and replaced with Earned Parole, which is a release that is decided on by the Parole Board of Canada (if and when it is earned by the offender). It has been well documented by corrections research that the conditional releases with the highest success rates are those that rely on the judgments of professionals and are based on proper risk assessments that focus on public safety, where the lowest success rates are for those releases by law, including statutory release.
- d. Legislative amendments are needed to ensure all conditional release decisions for first- and second-degree murderers are made exclusively by PBC. Following a denial of any form of conditional release by the Board, prison wardens can still grant escorted



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temporary absence passes such as work release to lifers, which essentially amounts to a day parole release. Many victims feel the warden decision-making process does not assess risk as thoroughly as the Board, allows an offender to evade accountability for the harm they have caused and is closed to public scrutiny.

- e. Updated photograph of the offender upon release - We are concerned about the safety of victims in cases of domestic and partner violence, especially upon release at warrant expiry. Some victims need a photograph to provide to their children's school to prevent access by a violent ex-partner. This has previously been recommended by the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.
- f. Frequency of parole hearing for lifers – there is a tremendous emotional toll on victims in facing the person who murdered their loved one in a parole hearing every two years, especially where there have been no significant changes in the offender's case. Parole reviews should take place every 5 years for lifers.
- g. In order to increase the number of federally registered victims in Canada, we feel the National Office for Victims should conduct a project to engage with national ethnic and multi-cultural organizations around the issue of victimization and the availability of federal victim services. This will help to increase awareness in minority communities across Canada.

**2. Victims' safety:** Personal safety is a primary concern for victims; therefore, we believe CSC and local partners should consider implementing victim wrap-arounds, where there is an imminent threat to safety of the victim. Victim wrap-around, pioneered in Washington State, allow victims, survivors and community members who are concerned about the return of an individual from the penitentiary to their community to discuss concerns with correction officials/police and other case managers and assists with the successful re-integration of offenders.

**3. Restitution:** Victims need help/support collecting restitution orders. We feel there should be a collection mechanism within CSC/PBC victim services. Only Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia currently boast programs to ensure that the collection of restitution for victims actually occurs. Saskatchewan's Adult Restitution Program and the Restitution Civil Enforcement Program provide information to victims about restitution and works with offenders to ensure payments are made in a timely and effective manner. The latter program pursues civil enforcement of the restitution order on the victims' behalf – including the garnishment of offenders' wages and bank accounts, the seizure of personal property, etc. Nova Scotia has recently implemented its own restitution project based on the success of Saskatchewan's experiences. Helping victims collect restitution orders would be an excellent way for CSC to increase offender accountability to their victims, especially in cases of fraud and other financial losses.

**4. Missing Persons Index:** We believe that the addition to the National DNA Data Bank of an Index for Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains can help the authorities find missing persons and solve unsolved crimes. The Missing Persons DNA Index will also provide families with a measure of relief because it reassures them that by submitting a biological



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sample; if their family member's remains are found they can be traced back to the family. We are calling upon you to ensure that this important tool becomes a priority of the federal government.

**5. Offering restorative justice as a service for victims:** Restorative justice programs should be offered to victims, as it can be beneficial for victims, who wish to participate, to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions about the crime and the harm arising from it. Such programs offer a variety of settings and circumstances through which victims, offenders and communities can address and repair the harm caused in a particular case. Since the goal of the process is repairing harm and restoring relationships victims are an important voice in making things right. Many victims have expressed high levels of satisfaction after having participated in such programs. Involvement may also help victims heal emotionally in the aftermath of the crime, as well as reduce the fear of the offender and further criminal victimization. We believe that CSC's Restorative Opportunities Program, an excellent program, should be offered as an option to all registered victims in Canada. We also feel that travel expenses for victims and support persons to meet face-to-face with their offender must always be paid for by the program.

I look forward to your response on these matters and am available to meet with you at anytime.

Best regards,

Heidi Illingworth  
Executive Director

cc.: Sue O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime