



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

July 21, 2014

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Attorney General of Ontario
McMurtry-Scott Building
720 Bay Street, 11th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K1

Dear Minister Meilleur:

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) would like to offer our congratulations to you on recently being re-appointed as the Attorney General for Ontario. We are writing to you concerning the programs and services offered by the Ontario Victim Services. While many Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Services (VCARS) programs receive funding across the province, they are short-term services and do not necessarily help victims rebuild their lives. The focus is on immediate, on-site or short-term assistance to victims, with staff making referrals to community agencies for long-term assistance.

At the CRCVC, we believe that victims have continuing needs and should not be shuffled between numerous community-based supports. The value in providing a continuity of support and assistance is clear as many victims report that they do not want to retell their story again and again. Once they have built trust with one service provider they do not want the support suddenly cut off. The response offered to victims and their families in Ontario should be based on an individual's continuing need and not be subject to artificial program cut off dates. Limiting the services offered to short-term or crisis assistance also assumes that there are other services in the community to take on medium and long-term support which is not necessarily the case. There is a lack of services in Ontario for victims of fraud or people who are assaulted by a non-partner, for example male victims of physical violence and robbery. Since most people victimized by crime do not report what has happened to the police, it is critical for MAG victim services to expand and offer medium and long-term support since most victims will not access system based programs like the Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP).

We ask you to consider reviewing the VCARS program with the view that it offer inclusive services that support a diverse range of victims and their families over the medium and long-term. Supports should go beyond immediate crisis intervention, practical help and emotional first aid. Victims suffer a number of losses and challenges as a result of crime and some suffer continued vulnerabilities. There may be longer-term challenges around finding safe housing, financial stability, social support networks and dealing with programs such as Criminal Injuries Compensation.



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Traumatic events fundamentally change the victim’s way of life and their psychological outlook. Healing requires a victim-centred approach that allows victims to regain a feeling of control over their lives. Statistics, mandates, budgets and standards are important, but the main focus should be assessing what victims actually need and allowing programs the flexibility to meet those needs. Ontario can become a leader in victim services in Canada by ensuring the medium- and long-term needs of victims are met in the wake of the trauma. We believe the VCARS model with the use of volunteers is an excellent way to do so but must be expanded to offer longer term supports.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Heidi Illingworth
Executive Director

Cc The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier
Ruth Campbell, Chair, Office for Victims of Crime