



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

June 25, 2015

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur  
Attorney General of Ontario & Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs  
Ministry of the Attorney General  
720 Bay Street 11th Floor  
McMurtry-Scott Building  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2K1

Dear Minister Meilleur:

I am writing to you in regards to the Ontario Court of Justice in L'Original vis-à-vis the lack of closed circuit television (CCTV) available to child victims of sexual assault to testify in a separate courtroom and the absence of private client/witness meeting rooms.

The closed circuit television (CCTV) testimonial aid is necessary in order to minimize revictimization and maximize the ability to provide best evidence. It is generally accepted that testimonial aids have improved the experience of children in the courtroom. Studies have reported the benefits of testimony outside the courtroom in facilitating the process of giving evidence. We believe it is critical to help children overcome their fear of testifying in front of the accused or in open court. Directly facing their abuser has many detrimental impacts on a child, including an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, shame and feeling unsafe.

There is an urgent need for CCTV in the L'Original courthouse. The number of child sexual abuse incidents is quite high in this region in comparison to other metropolitan areas such as Ottawa. My agency mistakenly assumed that with amendments that came into force in 2006, all children under age 18 can, upon application, access testimonial aids, including screens and CCTV, and have an identified (court-approved) support person. We were shocked to learn that L'Original cannot offer CCTV.

Children in Ontario who are survivors of sexual assault deserve to feel safe while they are testifying. Providing CCTV to the L'Original courthouse is long overdue. It is crucial that these vulnerable children be served effectively and feel safe enough to fully disclose what has happened to them, both as victims and witnesses, in the criminal justice system. Also, given that two-thirds of the population in this area of the province is Francophone, French-speaking children here deserve equal access to justice and should not be at a disadvantage when coming to the courthouse to testify.

We were also surprised to learn that the L'Original courthouse has an inadequate number of rooms for lawyer-client meetings. These rooms are essential for



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lawyers to consult with and prepare their clients before they are to appear in court. Our understanding is that currently there is only one existing meeting room available which is often being used. You must agree that several meeting rooms are required in order to help prepare victims as witnesses, to decrease levels of anxiety and to reduce the potential of revictimization. It is incomprehensible to us to have the victim facing the perpetrator in a waiting room before a court appearance. This is placing the victim in further harm's way. Victims have a right to being treated with respect, dignity and sensitivity and to be protected while accessing justice.

We hope you agree that CCTV is required, as well as an increased number of private meeting rooms in the Ontario Court of Justice in L'Orignal and that you will take immediate action to correct these significant gaps for victims. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Heidi Illingworth', written in a cursive style.

Heidi Illingworth  
Executive Director

Cc Ruth Campbell, Chair, Office for Victims of Crime