



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

July 8, 2016

The Honourable Louis Sebert, Minister of Justice
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT
X1A 2L9

Dear Minister:

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) has been working to ensure the equitable treatment of crime victims and survivors since 1993. We work in collaboration with many agencies serving victims across Canada, including those in the North. We are writing to reiterate our concerns over media reports of GNWT staff lay-offs, including the Manager of Victim Services.

We are shocked to learn about this decision to eliminate the Manager of Victim Services by the government of NWT when the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights is not even a year old and at a time when governments across Canada are recognizing the importance of serving people harmed by crime. A Victim Services Manager is needed to ensure that the victim services program is operating effectively across NWT. The position is of critical importance in supporting and offering ongoing training opportunities to the Victim Services Workers, most of whom work alone in their local programs in the community-based model of service in use in the NWT. Having the Manager at the meetings and knowledge exchanges of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Victims of Crime, (hosted by Justice Canada) is essential to provide the NWT's input and perspectives as a territory with equal importance to any other province or territory in Canada in the planning and development of services and supports for victims of crime and their families and communities. This cut means NWT will be noticeably the only jurisdiction in Canada that is not represented by a designated Victim Services Manager or Victim Services Director at the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Victims of Crime, which is hosted by the Policy Centre for Victim Issues of Justice Canada. This committee works diligently to address issues facing victims of crime across Canada and moves at a rapid pace.

The decision is also surprising given the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada about to begin. NWT will likely have a role in this inquiry. Family and friends of these missing and murdered indigenous women will have to relive the trauma and the heartbreak attached with revisiting the death or the absence of their loved ones. Victim services will be required and accessed by these victims in order for them to begin their healing process. The Victim Services Manager supports the front line workers who will be supporting the families through this process.

How does NWT ensure the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights without a Victim Services Manager? Training is needed for justice partners across the Northwest Territories, including justice workers and police officers, regarding changes to victims' rights. The Victim Services Manager was the most knowledgeable and experienced employee to provide this training to your justice partners and had been doing so until recently.



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It is shameful to lay off Ms. Ruth McKeown, who has worked extremely hard to strengthen and enhance the program over the last few years. She has made strong connections with the victim service workers (11 in the field across NWT), most of whom rely on the manager for support when they are feeling exhausted or overwhelmed. We are very disappointed that GNWT would treat an individual who has devoted their life to helping victims and survivors of crime in Canada this way.

We are also disappointed that the emphasis and focus in the NWT Department of Justice tends to remain primarily on offenders and their needs and rights. Victims are the ones who have experienced violence and trauma at the hands of the offenders, yet the justice system continues to disregard their rights and importance. Although governments are challenged to do more with fewer financial resources, we would expect your priority to be on victim services, given the high levels of victimization reported in the North.

We hope that your Department will reconsider this budget cut as a Victim Services Manager is critical to the functioning of your victim services program in the Northwest Territories. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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

Heidi Illingworth
Executive Director