



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

July 31, 2017

The Honourable Kathleen Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Members of Executive Council
Executive Branch
424 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

E-mail: ministryofjustice@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister:

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) was established in 1993 to act as a voice for victims in the Canadian justice system. We are concerned by three cases reported recently by CBC news, where victims of crimes like sexual assault have been jailed in your province to ensure their testimony. This treatment of victims, who are traumatized witnesses of the state, is profoundly unjust, insensitive and unwarranted. It is deplorable that we should have to write to you in 2017 to address this unbelievably poor treatment of victims of sexual violence.

We understand that you have a special committee looking into the policies and procedures around ensuring that victims are supported and respected through the justice system and that you have asked the committee to take these cases noted above into consideration. What has occurred in the province of Alberta is the farthest possible thing from ensuring victims of crime are treated with dignity, compassion and respect. It shows a complete lack of understanding by Crown officials about the neurobiological consequences of trauma.

We remind you that, “Not only must Justice be done; it must also be seen to be done.” Public trust and confidence is critical to the functioning of the criminal justice system. The justice system requires members of the public, as victims or witnesses, to report crime and to participate in successful prosecutions by offering evidence. Victims and witnesses will only co-operate and participate if they have confidence in the justice system as a whole.

We know that victims of sexual assault have a very hard time coming forward due to the shattering effects of this crime on their lives. We also know that the justice system has a very difficult time resolving these crimes. The response to complainants who are Indigenous, marginalized, racial minorities and those from lower socioeconomic status is decidedly poor.

How should the justice system react to vulnerable women who may be resistant to it because it has not historically been sensitive or respectful to them? The justice system should recognize the complexities in the lives of victims/survivors by asking complainants what they need and what supports would be



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helpful. If victims involved in the criminal justice system are not met with belief, support and protection from further victimization, the justice system is failing those who need it the most.

Instead of jailing victims who are the most vulnerable, Alberta should be increasing services and supports to these witnesses, including providing more opportunities for victims to participate fully in the criminal justice system (for example, by providing them with legal counsel who can defend their interests). We must not lose sight of the fact that achieving justice requires that victims' needs be respected and met.

We look forward to your response and to any recommendations of the special committee around the treatment of witnesses who are victims, and in particular vulnerable victims.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Heidi Illingworth', is written over the typed name.

Heidi Illingworth
Executive Director