



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

December 1, 2017

The Honourable Yasir Naqvi, Attorney General  
Ministry of the Attorney General  
11<sup>th</sup> floor, 720 Bay Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2S9

Dear Minister,

We are pleased with the recent announcement by the Ontario government of the *Safer Ontario Act (2017)* which will "modernize our approach to community safety, and improve police oversight and accountability". The Act includes significant actions designed to transform community safety and policing in Ontario, including:

1. A collaborative planning process for community safety and well-being that is mandated to municipalities and will include schools, social services and health;
2. Strengthening of police services boards, improving police education, training, and standards, and the creation of a Public Safety Institute; and
3. Improving police accountability with the creation of a new Inspector General of Police, improvements in police oversight and penalties for violations.

We believe it is important to tackle the root causes and risk factors associated with crime and victimization. The community safety sections of the legislation are consistent with the evidence on what prevents crime brought together in publications, such as Waller (2013) Smarter Crime Control, reports in 2012 and 2015 published by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and this [new information resource](#) from the World Health Organization.

The Ministry has promised a toolkit for municipalities on how to develop their plan. We agree it is very important to ensure municipalities have the skills and funding to develop individualized plans based on local needs and vulnerable populations. We know what is now well established as [effective](#) to impact crime. Municipalities will be mandated to work with police services and local service providers in health care, social services and education to develop community safety and well-being plans that proactively address community safety concerns.

If funded properly, this legislation will ensure fewer assaults, sexual assaults, break-ins, gang related activities, and lives lost from the consequences of crime. We believe funding must provide: better access to education and jobs for young people, positive parenting, protection of property through opportunity reduction, youth outreach workers and mentors keeping people out of gangs, better programs in schools to control drugs, conflict resolution, and ending sexual violence, and, positive



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supports for victims of violence in the health sector given the well-known impacts of interpersonal violence on physical and psychological health.

Less crime and victimization is a victim’s right and crucial to safer communities. In our view, the *Safer Ontario Act* is missing a key focus on crime victims. Ontario should do more to actively meet international standards on services and rights for victims. Basic practical actions for victims of crime are important and could significantly improve the response to victims of crime in Ontario. We call on your Ministry to implement the recommendations of the [McMurtry report](#) such as requiring police to inform victims of rights and services and establishing an office of the victim advocate.

Research repeatedly and consistently shows that victims of crime are reluctant to report their victimization to the police, particularly minorities, LGBT persons, those who’ve suffered anti-Semitic offences and violence against women. Several factors account for this systematic under-reporting. Victims are often not aware of their rights or do not know where to turn for help. Some victims weigh the costs of what they expect to be lengthy and bureaucratic procedures against the improvements these procedures would in the end make to their situation. Certain groups of victims suffer from feelings of fear, guilt or shame. In short, there are major factors that impede victims’ access to justice or discourage victims from coming forward. This can translate into fewer investigations and prosecutions and missed opportunities for victims to seek redress and to experience justice being done. As a result, offenders go unpunished and victims’ rights (and needs) can remain unmet.

The rights of victims to access justice and to be protected against repeat victimization will often remain theoretical and illusory as long as the victim is not advised and supported in a professional manner. We hope you will consider amending this legislation to include requiring police to inform victims of rights and services available to them and establishing the office of victim advocate who can monitor access to victim support structures/services and reductions in victimization, among other issues. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Heidi Illingworth  
Executive Director