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April 26, 2018

The Honorable Attorney General Yasir Naqvi
Ministry of the Attorney General
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Dear Minister Naqvi:

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) is writing in the wake of Toronto’s recent van attack tragedy to ensure that the victims’ and survivors’ financial, social and psychological needs are a top priority of the Ministry.

While we understand it is early days since the van attack occurred, we draw your attention to the well-documented need for long-term planning and interventions to support and address the needs of deceased victims’ families, injured survivors, witnesses and first responders. When mass violence strikes, existing systems for emergency management or terrorism planning have been based primarily on a public safety model of disaster response that focuses on saving lives and ensuring citizens’ immediate safety. For the most part, these models were not developed to take into account the human impact of mass criminal incidents. Response plans should recognize the social, psychological, and economic toll that might manifest itself in physical or emotional reactions.

Mass casualties, threat to life, exposure to trauma, and prolonged recovery efforts may result in significant and long-term emotional reactions. There are often higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and traumatic bereavement. The impact from human made disasters may be more prolonged, recovery may take longer, and may have the most profound psychological effects when compared with natural disasters. The psychological, behavioural and social impacts of a terrorist event have the potential to inflict the most persuasive, long-lasting and costly consequences to individual’s health.

We are concerned by the fact that Ontario’s Criminal Injuries Compensation Program has limited resources and capacity to respond to this event. For example, CICB legislation caps the maximum award allowable for any incident at \$150,000. The Victim Quick Response Program (VQRP) can immediately provide up to \$5,000 for funeral expenses and \$1,000 for counselling for family members of homicide victims. Given our experience working directly with family impacted by mass violence, this is nowhere near enough to address the broad scope of harm that may result from this incident. While the Financial Assistance for Families of Homicide Victims program also provides up to \$10,000 per homicide to eligible parents and spouses/common-law partners of homicide victims, families are not eligible for this if they apply for a pain and suffering award from CICB.

Due to the scope of this attack, we believe Ministry officials should consider creating a special fund to address this incident. Currently, there are 10 deceased individuals and 14 seriously injured victims who have survived. Having 24 direct victims apply for financial assistance, such as lost wages, counselling, funeral costs, etc. will exhaust the available funding quickly. The direct victims’ immediate family members may also



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be eligible to apply for assistance, as are witnesses and first responders potentially, making a very large group. Also, given that the van drove for 1 kilometre along one of Toronto’s busiest streets, we believe there could be a few hundred people affected significantly by the trauma of seeing the horrific attack unfold or intervening as good Samaritans. Is the Ministry prepared to respond to this large group who may have long-term needs?

CRCVC has developed a website that helps communities, response officials and governments prepare for and respond to terror and mass violence, located here: <https://terrorvictimresponse.ca/>. This site address victims’ needs at each stage of recovery. It also includes challenges that victims, both primary and secondary, may face as time goes forward and is based on the responses to incidents and experiences in jurisdictions from around the world. We strongly suggest that Ministry staff take the time to review the helpful information provided on the site, which provides a Checklist of issues that may arise from Pre-Incident (crisis response phase) through the Intermediate/medium term (consequence management phase) to Long-term recovery (recovery phase). Important issues to consider are: trauma response, impacts of media, donations, special considerations for children, mental health implications and memorialization. For example, it has also come to light in the media that there is a community fund that is raising donations for the victims of the attack, but who is responsible for distributing these funds to ensure that victims needs over the long-term are considered (other jurisdictions have learned that invisible injuries arise)?

What happened on April 23rd is tragic, and the City of Toronto, the province Ontario, our country and the world are still in shock that this attack took place in our peaceful nation. In the aftermath of mass violence, other jurisdictions have learned it is important to develop a comprehensive victim assistance plan (more here: <https://terrorvictimresponse.ca/lessons-learned/>). The CRCVC asks you to review how the victims, injured survivors, witnesses and first responders will be cared for over the long-term. We believe that you should immediately create a special fund at CICB to address this incident, as there are potentially hundreds of people who have been harmed by this violent attack. Ontario can mitigate the negative effects of this traumatic event on victims and survivors by ensuring that they have the support to recover and normalize their lives.

We hope you agree that fostering community resilience is critically important. Responding with compassion, support and practical/financial assistance to the victims and survivors of the incident in the immediate, intermediate- and long-term will help prevent isolation, letdown, grief, anger and other negative outcomes that are harmful to communities. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Heidi Illingworth
Executive Director

Cc The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario