



410 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, ON K1A 0R1

May 7, 2020

Aline Vlasceanu
Executive Director
Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime
100 – 141 Catherine Street
Ottawa, ON

Dear Ms. Vlasceanu,

This letter is in response to your correspondence of April 17, 2020, addressed to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Honourable Bill Blair. The Minister has requested that the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) respond on his behalf to the issues that you have raised in your letter.

I have read your letter, and I want to thank you for bringing forward your concerns in relation to the participation of victims of crime in PBC hearings during the exceptional situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you've indicated in your letter, we are currently implementing exceptional operational practices to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to protect the health and safety of the public, PBC Board members, staff, and offenders, the PBC is currently conducting its hearings remotely via videoconference or teleconference, as applicable. These actions are consistent with the decision of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to suspend visitors from its institutions, and align with current advice from public health officials around social distancing and prevention in relation to COVID-19.

The PBC remains committed to respecting victims' rights under the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* and making sure that victims' voices are heard during this unprecedented situation. For the past few weeks, the PBC has pursued solutions to technological limitations in order to accommodate victim attendance at parole hearings. I am pleased to inform you that we have now implemented technological and procedural enhancements in order to provide victims the ability to attend PBC hearings via telephone. This is an interim measure during the COVID-19 pandemic until such time as in-person hearings may safely resume. As a result of these efforts, victims are now able to listen to the hearing and present their statement for Board members to consider in their decision-making. For victims who prefer not to attend a hearing, the PBC continues to accept victim statements in various formats, including for presentation by audio or video recording. Based on early feedback from victims who have recently listened to parole hearings via telephone, there appears to be a general level of satisfaction with their experience.

The PBC continues to adapt and reassess its practices while being informed and guided by the advice and recommendations of public health officials. We are committed to keeping our hearing process as open and transparent as possible during the current pandemic. We trust that the new measures we have recently put in place for victims will help to ensure this.

Once again, thank you for bringing forward your concerns, and I trust this information is helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Oades". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "O".

Jennifer Oades
Chairperson