



June 7, 2021

Attention:

Gérard Deltell, House Leader of the Official Opposition

Peter Julian, House Leader of the New Democratic Party

Kevin Lamoureux, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons

Elizabeth May, Green Party of Canada

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons

Alain Therrien, House Leader of the Bloc Québécois

Karen Vecchio, Deputy House Leader of the Official Opposition

Re: Legislated Review of the CVBR

Dear House Leaders,

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) is a national non-profit advocacy organization. For the past 28 years, our mandate has been twofold: we provide direct advocacy services to victims of violent crimes across the country, and we work with all levels of government in Canada to provide submissions, presentations, information and recommendations in respect of the interests of victims of crime.

We are writing to you in the context of the urgent need for a Parliamentary review of Bill C-32, the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights (CVBR), enacted in 2015.

In 2019, the Department of Justice's review of Canada's criminal justice system acknowledged that victims often feel re-victimized under the current system and argues that major changes are needed to support the rights of victims, survivors, and their families.

The Act was set out to provide victims of crime with four statutory rights:

- To be provided with information about the justice processes related to the crime committed against them;
- To participate in those justice processes;
- To be protected from the accused/offender; and
- To seek restitution from the offender for financial losses sustained due to the crime.

The Act also included a requirement to designate or establish a committee of Parliament to review it five years after it came into force.

We believe that major changes must be made to the Act as it falls far short of delivering the real rights it promised.

The voices of victims and survivors are clear, and CRCVC's practical experience with the Act over the past five-plus years has demonstrated several shortcomings which have a real impact on CRCVC clients and crime victims across Canada including:

- Sporadic and inconsistent implementation of the Act
- Limited training opportunities for criminal justice officials
- No public education effort to inform citizens of their rights.

These shortcomings, and more, were published in the November 25, 2020, Progress Report on the CVBR, published by The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC). (The report is available here: <https://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/pub/PRCVBR-RECCDV/index.html>). The OFOVC's analysis clearly illustrates that the objectives set out in the Act were not achieved. The CRCVC agrees with the conclusions of the OFOVC.

Criminal victimization is a frightening and confusing experience. It is unpredictable, largely inevitable, and often unexpected. The effects can be debilitating and demoralizing, leaving victims confused, fearful, frustrated, and angry, often exposing them to long and difficult issues to overcome.

Victims often do not know where to turn or where to go following a crime. They feel insecure and do not know whom to trust or whom to rely on for assistance. Victims suffer physically, emotionally, psychologically and financially as a result of their victimization. Added to this is the burden imposed by the complexity of the criminal justice system.

The CRCVC works daily with victims, survivors and their families who are re-traumatized by a system that fails to adequately and automatically inform them of their rights and criminal justice procedures. Some of the most common complaints from CRCVC clients include:

- Learning about holding trials AFTER they have taken place
- Learning about their rights to submit a victim impact statement ONCE the deadline for filing such a statement has passed.
- Being unaware of their right to information about their federally incarcerated offender and accidentally coming into contact with their offender when the said offender is released into the community.

CRCVC walks through the shortcomings of the CVBR, helping thousands of victims, survivors and families each year. Specific examples abound, including:

- Helping registered victims of crime navigate the post-trial system, with organizations such as the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the Parole Board of Canada (PBC), in their search for information and participation in the hearings of their offenders
- Supporting victims who have had their rights violated to file complaints and who have not had their violations addressed or corrected.

This is in direct correlation to the shortcoming of the Act as victims do not have real, tangible remedies available to them.

Over five years have passed since the introduction of the CVBR, but victims still do not have real support from the government. In the lives of many victims of crime, the passage of time is counted in minutes. How long will the Government of Canada allow these victims to suffer before a parliamentary review of this Act comes to force?

You can truly empower and choose victims by putting them at the center of the criminal justice system. This is within your purview since a mandatory review was required, as prescribed by the Act itself.

The CRCVC recommends the review includes:

- allowing victims to seek legal and administrative remedies if they believe their rights have been overlooked;
- requiring the automatic provision of information by criminal justice professionals;
- guaranteeing support services and assistance for victims;
- collecting nationally consistent data aligned with the rights enumerated in the Act; and
- assisting victims with the collection of court-ordered restitution for the losses they have suffered.

As a Member of Parliament and a representative of the people, the CRCVC is calling upon you to use your voice to speak on behalf of the victims of crime in Canada who have lost theirs.

The CRCVC is happy to discuss this very important matter with you at your earliest convenience. We are also happy to testify and provide expertise at the Review, if and when it is called.

I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Aline Vlasceanu

Executive Director