

Kingston, September 16, 2011: Omnibus Crime Bill

The John Howard Society of Canada is committed to community safety and looks forward to contributing to effective legislative reforms and supporting programs.

The John Howard Society of Canada is concerned about current crowding in provincial and federal correctional facilities that endangers both inmates and guards, infringes rights, and reduces access to rehabilitative programs and reintegration support needed to promote community safety.

The John Howard Society of Canada is concerned that the proposed Omnibus Bill will be extremely expensive, will not promote public safety in the long run, and will endanger the safety of offenders and correctional staff in the short term by increasing the numbers in custody while infringing rights, undermining principles of justice, hindering rehabilitation, and having a disproportionately harsh impact on the most vulnerable.

We call for:

- Adequate time for public, expert, and other jurisdictions to study and report on the proposed massive overhaul to the justice and corrections system: current 100 day timeframe is inadequate and rushed previous testimony on elements may not apply to this complex Bill;
- Full disclosure of federal, provincial, and territorial costs of the Bill and an assessment of whether those resources would be more effective if used for rehabilitative/reintegrative programs, community-based accountability programs, measures to address underlying conditions such as addictions, mental health challenges, crime prevention programs, and victims services;
- Clear definition of the problem and evidence that the proposed solutions will be effective
- Compliance with principles of justice including proportionate penalties, a separate youth justice system, respect for rights, including protections against cruel and unusual punishment that are at risk in crowded prisons;
- Humane measures that respect the dignity of individuals and provide opportunities for reform and repair of the harm caused;

- Fair measures that do not have a disproportionately harsh impact on the most vulnerable, including those challenged with mental health issues, brain injuries and cognitive impairments, Aboriginal people, the poor, and the young; and
- Proclamation in force of any amendments that is contingent on provinces, territories and the federal government assuring Parliament that the expected increase in offenders will not exceed 100% of the corrections capacity and will not increase the deficit.

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