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Chair: Mr. Randeep Sarai





# Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.)):** We are resuming this meeting, which is meeting number eight of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I have two cue cards. When you're 30 seconds away from the end, I will raise one. When you're out of time—I don't like cutting people off—I just usually ask you to wrap up.

We have several panellists today. We'll have five minutes for each department. After that, you'll go through subsequent rounds of questions from the respective members of the committee. If you've missed something, you can probably add to some of your testimony during the time when the questions are asked.

I will begin by welcoming the Correctional Service of Canada.

**Mr. Chad Westmacott (Director General, Community Safety, Corrections and Criminal Justice Directorate, Crime Prevention Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** Thank you, Chair.

My name is Chad Westmacott. I'm the director general of community safety, corrections and criminal justice at Public Safety Canada.

We are pleased to be here today to share with you the work of Public Safety Canada's portfolio agencies with respect to our work to support the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights Act, CVBR.

I'm joined today by my colleagues Ian Broom and Kirstan Gagnon from the Parole Board of Canada and Correctional Service Canada, who also have roles to play in upholding victims' rights under the CVBR.

Public Safety Canada is responsible for the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which guides CSC and PBC in how federal sentences of two years or more are carried out and gives life to the rights ascribed to victims of federal offenders under the CVBR.

Within Public Safety Canada, the national office for victims is a resource working to improve victims' interactions with the federal corrections and conditional release system by working closely with Justice Canada and applying a victims' lens during federal correctional policy development, developing information products regarding federal corrections and conditional release, and coordinating with its partners at CSC and PBC. These agencies provide registered victims with information about the federal offender who harmed them, assist victims in submitting impact statements to be

considered in decision-making and facilitate victim attendance at parole hearings.

As mentioned earlier, in support of victims' right to information, the national office for victims and its agency partners have developed a number of information products to ensure that victims are aware of their rights and the services provided to them by the federal government. We continuously strive to improve these products and develop new ones with feedback from victims. For example, we recently launched several information products that explain basic sentence calculation rules for federal offenders, including how eligibility dates for various types of releases are determined. Since 2015, the national office for victims has distributed over 80,000 physical copies of its publications.

The CVBR established a means by which victims can complain directly to federal departments and agencies if they feel their rights have been denied or infringed. Should a victim not be satisfied with the outcome of a complaint, they can contact the office of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

To increase transparency of the complaint process, the national office for victims, in collaboration with its portfolio partners, prepares an annual report that compiles standardized information on complaints and how they were resolved in order to monitor new and emerging trends, address any systemic issues in policy and processes and identify opportunities for greater coordination to reduce the administrative burden on victims of crime.

Since the coming into force of the CVBR in 2015, the national office for victims has held four national round tables to discuss with stakeholders the implementation of the CVBR within federal corrections and the conditional release system. Themes raised at these tables were broad ranging. They included accountability, offender reintegration, restorative justice, and outreach and engagement. Importantly, we heard that information is essential for victims to be able to exercise their rights to participation and protection.

In 2020-21, CSC and PBC engaged with over 8,700 registered victims to ensure that they are aware of the services and opportunities available to them. CSC tailors its services at the request of each registered victim, including through their online portal. Each year, CSC's victims services officers complete close to 40,000 notifications about offender-related events.

The Public Safety portfolio is committed to implementing the CVBR to ensure that victims of federal offenders are treated with compassion and respect, including receiving timely information required to exercise their CVBR rights. To ensure that Canadians know about the services they may be eligible to receive, CSC continues to undertake public awareness campaigns, including specific efforts to collaborate with indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. Victims are also invited to participate in regional victim advisory committees to provide input and advice to corrections and parole authorities.

To further consider victims' needs in their operations, PBC established a committee on victims. The mandate of this committee is to provide information and insight on matters of policy and programs and to enhance the openness of the board through the timely exchange of information with victims on activities undertaken by the board that impact victims.

• (1605)

We are always seeking to improve and to be responsive to the needs of victims. As such, PS officials continue to review and examine stakeholder suggestions from round tables, as well as the recommendations contained in the federal victim ombudsman's CVBR progress report.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before committee today.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

I'm going to go to the Department of Justice for their presentation for five minutes.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor (General Counsel and Director, Criminal Law Policy Section, Department of Justice):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My colleague, Ms. Bouchard, will deliver our presentation.

Before she does that, I want to alert you and committee members to an additional Justice colleague who is with us, Ms. Susan McDonald, principal researcher, from our research and stats division. She will be able to help answer questions as well.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Stéphanie Bouchard (Senior Legal Counsel and Director, Policy Centre for Victim Issues, Criminal Law Policy Section, Department of Justice):** Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on Justice Canada's measures that support the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights.

[*English*]

Former Bill C-32, an act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, came into force in 2015. It gives victims of crime statutory rights to information, protection and participation and to seek restitution at the federal level. The 2015 amendments included related law reforms on testimonial aids, victim impact statements and resti-

tution, and introduced a new community impact statement provision.

As required by the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, Justice Canada has established a complaint process to address any alleged breaches of victims' rights, and prepares annual reports on this process.

The development of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights Act was informed by significant input from the provinces, territories and broad public engagement, reflecting the shared responsibility for the criminal justice system. As the committee knows, the federal government is responsible for the development of criminal law and procedure, much of which is set out in the Criminal Code. Provincial and territorial governments are principally responsible for the administration of justice, which includes enforcing and prosecuting offences and providing victims services.

Justice Canada supports work on victims issues through several key initiatives. The department leads the federal victims strategy, which seeks to improve the justice system for victims through funding, law reform and policy initiatives. Since 2015 almost \$78 million in federal funding through the victims fund has been invested in provinces and territories to assist them with implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and victim-related legislation, and to develop or enhance victims services. For example, funding has been used to support restitution recovery programs, testimonial aids for adult and child victims and witnesses, training on victims' rights, public legal education materials, and building victims services capacity and accessibility.

Justice Canada is also supporting innovative victims service models, such as the family information liaison units. These are culturally grounded and trauma-informed teams that work with family members of missing and murdered indigenous women. Justice Canada funding is also supporting expanded access to independent legal advice for victims and survivors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

Criminal Code reforms since 2015 have furthered the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bills of Rights. A few examples include that in 2018, former Bill C-51 amended the Criminal Code to clarify and strengthen Canada's sexual assault regime, including building on former Bill C-32 by providing a complainant with the right to counsel during a rape-shield provision. In 2019 former Bill C-75 enhanced measures to better protect against and reflect the serious nature of intimate partner violence, and strengthened the victim surcharge provisions.

Most recently, following the adoption of former Bill C-3 in 2021, in order to be eligible for appointment to a provincial superior court, candidates must agree to participate in continuing education on matters related to sexual assault law and social context.

Justice Canada continues to support broad research to identify trends as well as take note of how victims' rights are exercised in the criminal justice system and the impacts of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. This research informs our ongoing work.

Information-sharing and awareness-raising play a key role in justice system transformation. To that end, the department continues to support various public legal education opportunities and collaboration with partners. In addition to publishing fact sheets on victims' rights and designing new tools for police and other professionals, Justice Canada hosts the national Victims and Survivors of Crime Week, as well as webinars and knowledge exchanges. The victims week has been a huge success. It brings experts together to discuss ways to make our collective commitments to victims more effective.

Lastly, I would note that the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime was created in 2007. It is at arm's length from the federal government. The ombudsman's mandate is focused on areas of federal jurisdiction. There have been three ombudspersons appointed to date. A new GIC appointment process is currently under way.

• (1610)

[Translation]

In conclusion, I would say that Justice Canada continues to prioritize work to support victims of crime. Implementing the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights is an ongoing process, requiring actions from all levels of government working within their areas of responsibility in relation to victims' issues and victims' rights, and significant collaboration takes place across federal-provincial-territorial networks to ensure that their measures are coordinated.

We look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll go to our first round of questions, beginning with six-minute rounds, with Mr. Brock.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for their participation today and their opening statements. This is going to be very helpful to us in undertaking this particular study.

The focus of my questions in the time that I have allotted will be to justice officials and public safety officials. I won't be addressing anyone in particular, so anyone who is comfortable in answering the questions, please chime in.

I've taken the opportunity of reviewing some of the progress reports that were prepared by the former federal ombudsman, and specifically I took a look at her progress report. I couldn't agree more when she stated that "the adoption of a law in the books is different from its implementation in action." While putting victims first in every concept... "putting [that] into practice is far more diffi-

cult." The adversarial justice system relegates victims to roles of observers or witnesses in proceedings between state and accused. The Department of Justice acknowledged "that victims often feel 'revictimized' under the current system, and [agree] that major changes are needed to support...rights of victims".

As a former Crown prosecutor, I have seen first-hand the disconnect in terms of swaying the pendulum between protecting the rights of the accused at the expense of victims and not ensuring that they are properly informed. They have a right to proper information from not only the police but from Crown prosecutors, and to full participation in the process.

Bearing in mind the progress report from the former federal ombudsman, I'd like to know, from a departmental perspective, what changes had been discussed and what changes are about to be implemented to strengthen the Victims Bill of Rights?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** Maybe I can start with that question.

In terms of one of the earlier comments you made as to the importance of taking what's in the law and then transitioning it to application, we certainly agree with that statement. It's critically important that the laws that are developed be implemented in a comprehensive way. That's the first point.

On the second point, as you know responsibility for victims services is shared across all jurisdictions, so for our part—and my colleagues can speak to that more specifically—through our federal victims strategy and our funding agreements with the provinces and territories, we try to support them in their responsibilities for administering justice and supporting victims.

The third point I would note very quickly. Certainly with this review of the Victims Bill of Rights we're taking note of all suggestions from your committee in terms of reforms that are needed, obviously, paying close attention to the reports of the ombudsmen as well, and using all of that information to support the work we do in providing advice to the government on ways to strengthen responses to victims.

• (1615)

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Do any other witnesses wish to respond?

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** If I may, Chair, thank you very much.

I have just a few different elements on this one as well. There have been a number of amendments that have been put into place into the CCRA requiring different actions, both from our correctional partners and our parole partners, to ensure that victims have a significant role in the criminal justice system, including receiving the information that they require and opportunities to provide input into the decision-making mechanisms that are in play.

I'd also further like to add about the round tables I mentioned in the speech, which allow an opportunity for victims and victims groups to provide input into public safety and partners in terms of the best way to implement the CVBR. We take those recommendations into account.

Thank you.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** As a former prosecutor, I always took pride in establishing a trust relationship between the victims of crime and my office as a Crown prosecutor. That view was not always shared by my colleagues. From a departmental perspective, in light of the recommendations regarding training and ongoing education, I know that one of the witnesses who last gave an opening statement spoke about some of the changes that were made in terms of mandatory legal training for our judicial participants.

Are there any recommendations insofar as liaising with the provinces to strengthen the Crown system to ensure that there is mandated training so that there is a consistent level of execution in how we deal with victims of crime, particularly in a domestic context?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** I think we always try to find ways to support the enhancement of effective criminal justice system responses for victims. Whether that be through the work we do with FPT directors responsible for victims services, through our work with senior criminal justice officials or in collaboration with our federal prosecution service and directors of prosecution services across Canada, there are always those opportunities that we seek to maximize to enhance more effective victims service responses and more meaningful responses for victims—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

Thank you, Mr. Brock.

We'll go over to you, Ms. Diab, for six minutes.

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, witnesses. We recognize the important work that all of you do in advancing the rights of victims. This is not a perfect world, and obviously it's one that is usually intense for all parties. On behalf of the victims as well as others who get caught up in the justice system or the correctional system, thank you for everything you do.

I have a couple of questions. The Parole Board of Canada established a victim advisory committee and the Correctional Service of Canada launched an internal victim engagement task team. Can you explain how these initiatives are currently working to provide victims with greater support?

I'll go just a bit further and ask for anything that you can shed on—and it could be a different party answering that—the relationship between the provincial and the territorial and your counterparts in other provinces in relation to victim advisory services or things like this that you support.

Also, in terms of diverse communities, do you have a lens on that? If so, what is it? How do you carry that out for diverse communities, for people who have perhaps a different language from English or French, and a different culture, but also for other com-

munities, like the indigenous communities in my province of Nova Scotia, for example, African Black Nova Scotians and various other diverse communities?

I don't know who to address it to, so thanks. Go ahead.

• (1620)

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon (Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Engagement Sector, Correctional Service of Canada):** I can answer that.

Just to address a few parts of your question, it's really important to us to treat victims of crime, their survivors and their families with courtesy, compassion and respect and to make sure that throughout the criminal justice process and throughout an offender's sentence they have an opportunity for information and to participate in the process. There are a few ways we do that.

We engage with victims through a comprehensive outreach strategy that we put in place a few years ago. That includes outreach to indigenous, Black and other racialized communities, to be able to reach them and make them aware of our services.

Part of getting them to register for information is making them aware of what's available, in addition to the work we do with provinces and territories to reduce any gaps or to streamline any offerings with those provinces and territories. There are some examples of that in British Columbia. For example, when folks apply for victims services, on that form, they have an opportunity to tick a box to also be engaged by the Correctional Service of Canada, so that there's one less step there for them to receive our services as well.

Secondly, I would say that we have regional victim advisory committees in five regions across Canada. These are victims who sit on these committees, in addition to management and others, and they do help us provide and seek advice and get their involvement in the process throughout.

Thirdly, we get ongoing feedback from victims through our victim services officers, who are trained through a trauma-based approach. Our parole officers also receive training on victims so that there's greater alignment.

We also get that feedback through our complaint mechanism. We do have very few complaints that come in through that process; I think last year there were 10 out of 40,000 contacts. The program is doing quite well in terms of receiving that ongoing feedback, but there's always more work to do.

We are also embarking on survey of victims with the Parole Board of Canada to further analyze our services and see if there are additional gaps or things that we can do for victims, both to be able to reach them and to ensure they have what they need to participate in the process.

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** Thank you.

**Mr. Ian Broom (Director General, Policy and Operations, Parole Board of Canada):** To follow on that, from the perspective of the Parole Board of Canada, if I recall correctly, you asked about our PBC committee on victims, so I'd like to provide a little bit on that.

This committee provides information and insight directly to the chairperson on matters of policy and programs, to enhance the openness of the board through the timely exchange of information with victims on activities undertaken by the board that could impact victims.

I'll speak a little bit to outreach. To ensure that victims are included in the conditional release process and are aware of the services available to them, the board regularly delivers outreach sessions across Canada to victim service agencies and to victims themselves. We've also increased our efforts to reach out to racialized and indigenous victims in particular. In 2020-21, the Parole Board participated in approximately 65 victim-related outreach events across the country with community and government partners.

We also have a number of victim-specific communication products that are targeted to victims. For example, we'll be launching a new victim services video next month to provide victims with up-to-date, easily accessible information on how they can participate in the conditional release process and the services available to them.

I just wanted to add those items from the board, Mr. Chair.

• (1625)

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Diab.

I'll next go to Mr. Fortin for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses who are with us today. I know some of them were here in the spring, by the way. So that's double duty for them. I thank them for that. Their participation is always helpful.

I would like to start by addressing Ms. Bouchard, from the Department of Justice.

Ms. Bouchard, I think I discussed this with you in June, but can you tell me how much money is transferred to the provinces for the management of programs for the protection of victims and their rights?

**Ms. Stéphanie Bouchard:** Good afternoon.

I was indeed here in June, but this time my colleague Cyndi Fuss, who manages the victims' program, is here with us, and she will be able to give you the information requested.

I'll turn the floor over to her.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Thank you.

**Ms. Cyndi Fuss (Manager, Programs Policy, Department of Justice):** Thank you, Ms. Bouchard.

Provinces and territories receive funding under several components, including for the implementation and coordination of victim services, for the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, as well as for support to Family Information Liaison Units. These units assist families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. They also receive funding for legal advice relating to victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

Since 2015, we have provided \$38 million to provinces and territories to implement and improve victim services—

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Ms. Fuss, I'm sorry to interrupt you.

I understand it's \$38 million for all provinces and territories, but did you break it down by province?

**Ms. Katherine Cole:** No, but I can certainly send you that information.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** So, would you have done the breakdown by program, since you listed a number of them?

**Ms. Katherine Cole:** The \$38 million mentioned was used to improve services to victims. In terms of other components, since 2015, provinces and territories have received \$13 million for Bill of Rights implementation, \$23 million for Family Information Liaison Units, and \$32.5 million over five years for legal advice.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Will you be able to send me the figures broken down by program and province?

**Ms. Katherine Cole:** Yes, I will send them to you.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Thank you very much.

To address this whole issue, I would like to speak to Ms. Bouchard from the Department of Justice again.

Ms. Bouchard, in your thinking about the program and the legislation, have you examined the possibility of considering the families of those convicted as indirect victims of crime?

There is general agreement that children of 10 or 12 years of age whose fathers have been convicted of murder, for example, suffer significant consequences, particularly at school. One only has to think of the stress and psychological impact on these families.

Has this ever been considered in the various programs set up under the law?

**Ms. Stéphanie Bouchard:** The definition of "victim" is found in section 2 of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and in the Criminal Code. I'll give you the one from the Bill of Rights. A victim is "an individual who has suffered physical or emotional harm, property damage or economic loss as the result of the commission or alleged commission of an offence."

Under the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and the Criminal Code, children who have not been abused by their parents are not considered victims of crime simply because their parents are incarcerated.

My colleagues from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness could tell you about the tools and measures in place to help the families of those who are incarcerated.

• (1630)

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Thank you, Ms. Bouchard.

I am well aware that under the Victims Bill of Rights, indirect victims are not considered victims of crime. Rather, my question is whether you have ever considered including indirect victims in the definition of “victim”.

**Ms. Stéphanie Bouchard:** You had also raised this issue last June.

We will look at it according to the recommendations and the information that will be given to us, as explained by my colleague Mr. Taylor earlier. At the moment, indirect victims are not included in the current definition.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Is there anyone else, among the witnesses present, who could speak to this issue?

From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, for instance—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Fortin, the time is up.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** All right.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sure you'll have another round.

Mr. Garrison, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being with us today.

I want to start by asking a question about who currently avails themselves of the services of the office for victims.

I understand from previous testimony that we've heard here in this committee, in the last Parliament, and also from experience in my own riding, that it tends to be white, middle-class, people who get served. It seems that marginalized people, indigenous people and people who live in poverty, not by intention, but by the structural challenges they face, often don't find out that these services are available, or they're hesitant to access the services because of previous experience with policing and other parts of the system.

Has there been any work done on who is actually accessing the existing programs and how can we do a better job of reaching the more marginalized ones?

Maybe that goes to Public Safety, which is where the office is lodged.

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** All right. I'll start.

There's a difference between the national office for victims and those victims who avail themselves of the services of the Parole Board and the CSC in terms of being able to obtain information about specific offenders or specific court cases.

I'll start us first on the national office for victims.

Over a number of years, as I mentioned, there have been 80,000 publications given out in hard copy as well as significant access to the website. The website provides information on the rights that the victims have under the CVBR as well as a variety of information about the correctional system including, most recently, some fact sheets about how sentences are determined. That provides victims with information about how they can access the services available to them and how they can better understand the correctional system.

There are a number of registered victims, as I mentioned in my speech, with over 8,700 registered victims who can access the services of the CSC and the PBC in terms of information. I can also turn to either my colleagues, Kristan or Ian, to see if they have additional information to add.

Perhaps we can start with Kristan.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I would add that we collect this data around different ethnocultural groups and indigenous groups, as well, and it is predominantly white. However, there are some across other ethnocultural groups, as well.

Something that we've made a focus of in our national outreach strategy is targeting indigenous, Black and racialized groups, because they can be affected by crime at a higher rate and we want to make sure that we reach them through a variety of means, intermediaries and organizations. We do a lot on social media. We are reaching out through the Crown prosecutors. We're using the tools at our disposal to be able to reach those individuals and make them aware of our services so that they can register.

It's also one of the initiatives in CSC's anti-racism framework and action plan priorities.

I'll let you add to that, Ian.

• (1635)

**Mr. Ian Broom:** I would add that for the Parole Board, as well, the focus is on outreach to those groups to ensure that folks are aware of the information services and the opportunity to participate from the Parole Board perspective.

We have a working group on diversity and systemic racism, and this is part of the considerations that this group has under way. In addition, the chairperson has a chairperson's indigenous circle. The topic of how to most effectively undertake engagement and opportunities to improve outreach has been discussed with that group, as well.

We're always striving to ensure that we enhance the outreach to reach those marginalized populations.

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** If I may add one more item, in the documentation that I was referring to from the national office for victims, I wanted to flag that some of our publications are available in 20 languages, including seven indigenous languages.

Thank you.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** That's great.



I'm very happy to hear there's some active outreach and awareness of the problem of outreach. However, I also think that those who live in poverty, no matter their background, are disproportionately victims of crime, and they're also the people who are the least likely to have access on a regular basis to the Internet or information that's online. I hope that when you're doing these things, there's some attention paid to that.

I'm not sure how much time I have, Mr. Chair, but I want to start on the question of language rights. In our criminal justice system, we guarantee the language rights of the accused, but we don't do anything that I can see in victims' rights to guarantee that victims have access to supports when either court or parole proceedings take place in a language that's not their first language.

Is there some attention being given to the language rights of those who are victims of crime, since we do a pretty good job on the other side?

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, please.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I can add that we also distribute hard copies, and that plain language is also really important for reaching victims—especially people who are traumatized—to be able to make clear what's available and how to access it, and then provide the choices and options.

Ian, I see you have something to add as well.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, I'm going to have to cut you off there. I hope we'll get back to you.

I want to remind everyone—I think there was talk before about submitting something when Mr. Fortin was speaking—that any information you have to send, please send it to the clerk. The clerk will then distribute it to everyone.

Next we have Mr. Cooper for five minutes.

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I will address my questions to whomever is in the best position to respond, from either Correctional Service of Canada, the Parole Board or Public Safety.

I think it was the official from Public Safety who stated a few moments ago that there were some 8,700 victims registered to receive information, but as of 2018-19, there were some 23,000 offenders under federal responsibility. I presume that number has not changed significantly, so there's quite a considerable gap between the number of persons who are incarcerated and the number of victims who have registered for information. As the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime, Heidi Illingworth, emphasized, that is a foundational right. Without it, victims cannot effectively assert other rights.

Could any of the officials speak to that gap between the relatively small number of victims who have registered, relative to the number of persons incarcerated in federal custody?

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** I will start off and then potentially turn to my colleagues.

I would point out that the registration by CSC and PBC to receive information ensures that information is provided to individuals who meet the legislated definition of a victim. Only those victims who desire continued contact following convictions are notified. This is a trauma-informed response, which respects the choice of victims who wish no further involvement with the criminal justice and corrections system regarding the offender. Not every victim wants to receive the information that is available to them through the CVBR.

My colleagues from PBC or CSC would perhaps like to add something.

• (1640)

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I can reiterate that it's definitely not a one-size-fits-all approach. We try to customize the information that we provide based on the interests of these victims. Some victims don't want to register to receive information, and that's their choice. If they change their minds at any time in the process, of course, they are able to register and provide victim statements, etc., and participate in the process.

Also, through active outreach, we'll be able to reach more people to make them aware and to remind them that we're there to provide these services. That's what we're mandated to do under the law as well.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you for that.

Now, in the January 2021 report from the federal ombudsman for victims of crime, entitled "Information as a Gateway Right", the ombudsman found that the requirement of registration itself is problematic. Victims who perhaps would like to receive information but aren't familiar with the process and don't know how to self-register are left out. It is her recommendation that rather than providing for self-registration, victims should be automatically registered, with an opt-out provision.

Have you given some thought to the recommendation of the former ombudsman?

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** It goes to what I was saying earlier, which is that we want to take a trauma-informed response that respects the choice of the victims. Moving to a system where the victims automatically receive our information does not respect that trauma-informed response or the choice of victims. It is very important that victims have that opportunity to decide if they want to receive that information, or have the ability to not receive that information if they do not want to receive it.

In order to ensure that victims have the information available to them in terms of registering and how to receive that information, that is one of the key pieces of information available through the national office for victims. As I mentioned, that information is available both in hard copy, free of charge, and on the website, in a number of different languages.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Next, for five minutes, we have Madam Dhillon.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to focus my questions on discrimination against marginalized people. We see them often within the criminal justice system itself.

My first question will be for Ms. Bouchard.

You spoke about matters coming before the ombudsperson. Can you please explain to the committee how many of these issues or complaints are regarding racism in the system and whether it comes from the victims' side, the offenders' side, or both? How are these resolved?

**Ms. Stéphanie Bouchard:** You are referring to my remarks where I spoke about the justice complaint mechanism that we developed after the coming into force of the CVBR.

I can't speak to all the different questions and data that you asked for specifically or to whether we have the numbers for all the various types of complaints. What I can say is that all our annual reports are published online, and so far, since 2015, there have been only two CVBR complaints that were found to meet the complaint mechanism that exists for Justice Canada.

One thing to remember is that Justice doesn't provide direct services to victims of crime, so mostly complaints relate to the right to information and to the Parole Board funding that's provided through the victims fund to permit victims to attend Parole Board hearings.

Most inquiries we receive relate to PT administration of justice or various complaints. We make an effort to respond to each inquiry that comes through the complaints mechanism and provide the person with information regarding where they can access the proper source for information, either directly through PT victims services or through the victims services directory that's available on our website, which permits victims to enter their postal code and find the resources that are near them.

• (1645)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I would just add that, for Correctional Services Canada, we have a complaint process as well. We received 10 complaints last year over 40,000 contacts, so there were very few.

They relate mainly to rights, so to information protection and participation and to those who seek restitution, but not to racism.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** That's perfect. Thank you so much.

Both the PBC and CSC have regional advisory committees. With such an approach whereby you get victims to volunteer to be on these committees, can you please tell us what percentage of people who sit on these committees are marginalized? If you don't have that information, could you please provide it to the committee after?

Thank you.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I don't have that with me, but I'm happy to provide it, yes.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** That's perfect.

Mr. Westmacott, you spoke about offender reintegration. Can you tell us what criteria are looked at when this happens and the determination that is usually made?

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** I'm sorry, but could you clarify a little bit more the context of offender reintegration?

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** You spoke about offender reintegration, and I want to hear just a little bit more about that. Could you elaborate on the criteria or give us any further information?

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** I'll turn to my colleague from CSC for conversations around the criteria for offender reintegration.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I'll try to tackle that one as well as I can.

We do a number of things around offender reintegration, including the work that the parole officer does in the community to ensure adequate supervision of offenders who are released into the community.

If I may go back to one of the things raised earlier, I will use this opportunity to address the question on the national task team we have in place. We are doing quite a bit of work with our operations group and victims services to try to bridge any gaps between offenders who are on release or temporary absences within the community...to look at how we're delivering on those operational aspects, and to see if there's anything more we can do around upholding the Victims Bill of Rights in that decision-making—such as preventing negative reactions from victims, for example—and in case management decisions and also improve on collaboration at all levels—regional, national and local—so we can incorporate victims' concerns in our decisions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gagnon.

Next, for two and a half minutes, we have Mr. Fortin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I now turn to the representatives of the Department of Justice.

What restorative measures has the department considered?

A defendant is going to suffer the consequences of their action. They are going to go to jail or pay a fine, but has consideration been given to implementing restorative measures that bring the victim of the crime and the accused closer together?

Sometimes it is not possible to do that. Obviously, I am not asking that the person who raped a young lady meet with her to talk things over. However, restorative measures could be considered, at the very least, to correct the wrongful behaviour and assure the victim that attention is being paid to their situation. The victim must be made to understand that the purpose of the system is not only to convict the accused, but also to accompany the victim and help them through this painful process, and help them move on.

• (1650)

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** Thank you for the question. I will answer it on behalf of the Correctional Service of Canada.

The Restorative Opportunities program has been in existence for 20 years. It is a very successful program and one that we believe in very much.

It is a voluntary program, meaning that victims and the offenders who have harmed them must want to participate. We really take the time to design a mediation plan that meets everyone's needs and goals. It can be a very powerful mechanism. We never turned anyone away who expressed a desire to participate in the program. We do a lot of work in this regard federally, provincially and territorially.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Ms. Gagnon, please forgive my rudeness, but I must interrupt you, as I have very little speaking time left.

I understand that this program operates on a voluntary basis. Has consideration been given, for instance, to the possibility of reducing a prison sentence if the accused agrees to participate in certain restorative measures? Is there anything in place to further promote restorative measures in the justice system?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** Mr. Fortin, I will answer your questions in English, as it will be faster.

[*English*]

Section 717 of the Criminal Code does contemplate alternative measures and restorative justice processes. Those can happen at different places. They can happen pre-charge. They can happen post-charge. They can also happen as part of the sentencing process. There are those opportunities within the criminal justice system currently to facilitate the restorative justice sentences.

In terms of the imposition of a sentence, a judge is always required to impose a fit sentence based on all of the particular circumstances surrounding the case.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Garrison, you have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to follow up on the excellent questions from Mr. Cooper on the gap between the number of victims registered and the number of offenders. While I think there will always be a gap—many victims may not want to avail themselves of services—I think what Mr. Cooper was asking about is how do we know that victims are making a choice if they don't know they have a choice?

I guess this is to Mr. Westmacott. If they don't ever receive the initial information about what rights or services they might receive, how do we know they're making an informed choice? I know that you talked about respecting the rights of that choice, but I think the question was really more about how we know that they can make a choice if they don't have that information.

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** You know, there's a lot of work done to make sure that the information is available so that victims are aware of the rights they have and the ability they have to obtain information, including through promotion through the national victims week and the various aspects and steps along the criminal justice system.

I will also turn to my colleague Kirstan. She might have something to add.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I just wanted to add that over the past two years, we did see a 10% increase in our registered victims. It is a trend in the right direction. We do know that during COVID, the website traffic was up almost 22%, I believe.

I think there are some good indicators there that more people are accessing service in a virtual way as well. PBC might have something to say about that too. It's definitely trending in the right direction, but no, currently we don't require mandatory registration.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Thanks very much.

**Mr. Ian Broom:** From the....

Oh, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** I am going to cut you off; I was going to ask a different question. It is going to be for you at Parole Board.

I have an institution in my riding where lots of people end up going for parole. During COVID, we found that many victims were having trouble attending those hearings or getting information about those hearings. They were effectively being denied their right to participate.

I don't think this was intentional, but I just wonder how you've tackled this problem of getting information and allowing victims to participate in those processes when they became virtual.

• (1655)

**Mr. Ian Broom:** I'm happy to respond to that question. Thank you.

The board is committed to ensuring that victims' voices are heard, their rights are respected and there's the opportunity to participate.

However, as you point out, as a result of limited access to CSC institutions at the outset of the pandemic and throughout, depending on the situation in the communities in terms of transmission, PBC hearings were conducted remotely. In April 2020, the Parole Board implemented an interim solution for victims to participate by teleconferencing—

**The Chair:** Mr. Broom, I'm going to have to cut you off there. I'm sorry.

We'll go over to Mr. Morrison for five minutes.

**Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'm just going to dive into something we haven't really talked a lot about, which is national standards for training for the treatment of victims. I guess I'd like to see both sides. We have justice and we have public safety.

Are there national standards for the treatment of victims right now for, say, the judges, and for all the departments on the public safety side? If there aren't, are you going to develop them?

The last question is, who's accountable to ensure that people in those departments are actually treating victims under a national standard, so they're all treated consistently? It seems we're kind of all over map.

Maybe each department can just explain a little bit about what you're doing to ensure there's a national standard for the treatment of victims.

**Ms. Susan McDonald (Principal Researcher, Research and Statistics Division, Policy Integration and Coordination Section, Department of Justice):** Perhaps I can begin, Mr. Morrison.

Are you speaking about standards through the Standards Council of Canada—the SCC—and the formal development of national standards?

**Mr. Rob Morrison:** Sure, but I'm also speaking of when we require, for example, criminal justice or law enforcement personnel to have continuous training. Part of that training would be if they are aware of the treatment of victims. Do they know how to treat victims?

Maybe we could close that gap from unreported to reported if there was a standard.

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** I think the Canadian statement of basic principles addresses that standard. That has been signed on to by all provinces and territories, which are responsible for the administration of justice. That falls under their domain.

I can turn this over to our Public Safety portfolio colleagues to address the issue of standards in their respective agencies.

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** Thank you very much.

I'll just jump in very quickly and say that training is available through the Parole Board for their regional communications offi-

cers and in the CSC for the victim services officers. That helps to ensure consistency in services.

Also, the complaints process that is set up through the various agencies is a way to ensure that, if these services are not provided in a way that a victim feels is appropriate or respects the rights, there is that opportunity to raise that complaint and concern.

I'll turn to my colleague, Kirstan.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** Thank you.

Registered victims tend to be those who are affected by the most violent crimes. They may be more seriously harmed, so it's super important to do really good training.

We have victim services officers across the country who get regular training. We also have it in the parole officer induction program. Working with stakeholders on an ongoing basis to get advice on how best to reach victims on an ongoing basis is key, as well as organizations that are trusted—

**Mr. Rob Morrison:** Okay, perfect.

I know I didn't get to parole, but I'm going to run out of time here and I wanted to move on to data.

The sharing of information between agencies seems to be a consistent issue, not only in the federal government, but in a lot of different places. Reading through some reports...the police, for example, don't report the number of interactions with victims. Crown prosecutors' information isn't shared. Courts, review boards, correction services, parole boards are pretty well the same, where we do not have any sharing of information.

This is probably more for Public Safety because there are more agencies there. How do we correct that?

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** Please go ahead, Kirstan.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I just was going to say, to kick that one off, that to ensure better protection of the public, our parole officers work with and share information with police agencies across the country in most jurisdictions where offenders are released into the community as law-abiding citizens. This helps to ensure public safety on an ongoing basis and also to protect victims in those communities.

• (1700)

**Mr. Rob Morrison:** Okay.

Maybe I have one last question for Public Safety. I have only 30 seconds.

We talked about restorative justice for offenders, which is a great program, I know. I have been involved in that, especially on Vancouver Island.

Restorative justice for victims is really interesting. Is there federal funding there, the same as federal funding for victims services?

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** Our restorative opportunities program is funded some through existing funding at CSC. Were you looking for those exact figures?

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, you're out of time. If you have those figures, you can send them to the clerk afterwards.

Next, for five minutes, we have Madame Brière.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to you all.

I thank the witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

In the January 2021 report of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, the ombudsman said he wished that the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights would give victims better access to information and that greater consideration would be given to their safety.

Yet, in the Canadian criminal justice system, victims continue to report to the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime that they are not adequately informed about their rights and the services available to them. They even recommend that a distinction be made between factual information about different stages of the judicial process, such as bail hearings, appeals against sentence, appeals of release denial orders, and informal information, such as explanations related to decisions made by judges.

How do you explain this difference between the theoretical law and its practical implementation?

Is the fact that the burden of requesting information is on the victims at every stage of the case a hindrance to them?

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

The right to information, as the ombudsman has noted in her 2021 report, she considers a “gateway right”. I think everyone at this table can agree that the right to information is very important. Victims have always wanted information.

There's an article we've prepared that looks more closely at this right to information, but particularly in the context of the impact of trauma on learning and what victims, those who are particularly traumatized by their victimization experience, are actually able to retain in terms of memory being affected, and the different strategies for that. The article is called “The Right to Information” and we can forward the link to you. It is available online in both official languages in the “Victims of Crime Research Digest” of 2016.

Importantly, what we looked at, too, was that, at the outset, even before the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights came into force, the Department of Justice reached out to key victim stakeholders through the Policy Centre for Victim Issues and conducted a survey to really determine how these stakeholders wanted to learn about the CVBR, in what format, in what mode and on what particular topics, exactly as you referred to: the factual aspects of how the criminal

justice system works, actual specific amendments to the Criminal Code, etc.

These results came in, and we had 604 responses. There were 38 from individuals and 62 from organizations all across the country, with some really good marching orders in terms of how to get that information out there. That's one aspect of the article. The other parts talk about research from different fields, such as psychology, to really understand the right to information and the particular group of victims.

I hope that begins to answer your question.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Élisabeth Brière:** Thank you.

To which bodies can victims turn to get the relevant information? I feel like there is some buck passing going on.

What about the confidentiality aspect?

[*English*]

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** The Department of Justice supports the development and enhancement of child advocacy centres, and has been doing so since 2010. In those instances, child advocacy centres include a multidisciplinary team. For those teams, specific information-sharing protocols are signed, so law enforcement can share information with others sitting around the table, which might include mental health professionals, medical professionals, advocates, victim services, Crown, for example. In those cases, the flow of information seems to work very well, particularly where a victim advocate is there to pay attention to the non-offending family member—for example, a parent.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Brière.

Now for five minutes we go to Ms. Findlay.

Welcome to the committee today.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Section 16 of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights grants victims “the right to have the court consider making a restitution order against the offender.”

Has there been an increase in restitution orders since section 16 has been enforced?

I'm not sure who wants to answer.

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** I can speak to that, Madam Findlay.

The short answer is we're not sure, which sounds very vague and “un-data-like”, and my apologies for that.

We have, through a special request, been able to get data from the Canadian centre for justice and community safety statistics at Statistics Canada. We are able to look at data prior to 2015. It's on a fiscal-year...so it would be up to 2014-15, and then 2015-16 up to 2019-20. At this time, looking at both adult and youth court statistics of restitution orders made by type of restitution order, it does not look like there has been an increase.

Feedback from provinces and territories from which the data are collected has indicated that the numbers provided by our national statistics agency are less than what they have at home. We don't quite understand the discrepancies, but we are going to be following up and scheduling meetings in the coming months to do so.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** It sounds like the process of monitoring isn't very robust, but if you have some of those figures, perhaps you could table them with the committee.

How are such orders enforced? Would you suggest change is needed to make enforcement easier for victims?

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** When enforcement is still in the criminal justice system, so when there are restitution orders, a condition of a conditional sentence or probation, community corrections works very closely with the offender to develop a payment regime. For example, a schedule or payment is made at the outset, paid to the court, and then transferred to the victim. In stand-alone orders, there is no such supervision. If the order expires, this then results in the onus being on the victim to file that order in civil court and use civil measures for enforcement, which can be very difficult.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Yes, it sounds quite onerous, actually.

In 2019, a declaration of victims' rights was incorporated into the military justice system, through Bill C-77 amending the National Defence Act. Can one of you tell the committee when victims in the military justice system may expect to benefit from the declaration of victims' rights? My understanding is it's been almost three years since royal assent, and that declaration is still not in force.

• (1710)

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** I think your committee will be hearing from witnesses from the Department of National Defence, and they'll be better able to answer that question. We understand they're working diligently, and they'll be best placed to provide more information.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** My understanding comes from testimony in June of 2021. The then-federal ombudsman said that:

Critically, what we hear from victims.... The largest gap in the bill in its current form is that there's no ability to enforce the rights within the act.

Can you suggest what can or should be done to ensure that the rights outlined in Bill C-32 are enforced, while continuing to respect the rights of the accused, of course, and of convicted offenders?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** Maybe I can start, Ms. Findlay. That is a very good question, and we know it's one that's been talked about for many years.

Our colleagues have already talked about the complaints processes that have been established to address concerns that rights are not being implemented at the federal level. There are corresponding

processes in place with provincial partners, provincial victims service agencies and prosecution services.

As the VBR makes clear, it's not meant to take away any pre-existing rights that victims might have to commence, for example, civil proceedings where wrongs have been alleged.

I'll stop there because I know I don't have a lot of time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Taylor.

Thank you, Ms. Findlay.

Next, for five minutes, we will move to Mr. Zuberi, please.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** I'd like to thank all the officials for being here and taking the time to discuss this very important issue.

I'd like to touch upon diversity and inclusion for a few moments.

When it comes to newly landed communities in Canada, are there outreach efforts being made to help them access supports, in particular for those who haven't yet mastered one of the official languages and who are still maybe using another language? Are there outreach efforts to connect with those communities, and if so, can you describe what those are?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** Maybe I'll start again.

Again, one of the challenges with this area is the shared responsibility. As you know, different levels of government are responsible for supporting the implementation of victims services.

Federally, on the justice side—and you've heard from our colleagues on the public safety side—we try to make information available in different languages to support victims who may not speak English or French. Primarily, we would seek to work with community organizations and our provincial and territorial partners to address those important needs, as you've identified.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Just to follow up quickly, do community organizations then have people who can communicate in languages other than English and French, just to access those who are living within Canada, to help them navigate the system?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** I think we would have to get back to you with more specific information on the community organizations that we support, and the types of services that they provide in other official languages.

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** Sorry, can I just jump in very quickly?

• (1715)

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Please, go ahead.

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** We do have a victims services directory, and it includes information on languages spoken and whether there are particular populations.

We see this particularly in instances of family violence where there is a very good network of shelters but also community organizations that will work with victims. Whether it is a female in an intimate partner violence situation, or a case of violence against the children, we'll work with them and strive to work with them in their own language to understand the particular dynamics and culture from which they come.

You may know that in Ottawa, about a year ago, a shelter opened up specifically for Muslim women. It's the first of its kind in Ottawa, and by all accounts it's been very successful, both in terms of providing information and also actual service through the shelter.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** That's excellent to hear, and reassuring.

While I personally feel strongly that all in Canada should learn at least one if not both of the official languages, the reality is that not everybody has that capacity when they land here. It takes some time. It's good to hear that it is clearly a partial focus.

Continuing on that theme, I'd like to move into trauma and those victims who have suffered some form of trauma. Are there supports for them that are culturally sensitive or that nuance the various different cultural communities within Canada or life experiences? Can you elaborate a bit more about that?

**Ms. Susan McDonald:** I can jump in.

Again, using the example of family violence, I think they're very culturally appropriate. This is not just for immigrants, we also see this with people who are living in Canada who practise a different faith or feel more comfortable with people speaking their mother tongue, for example, as well as indigenous people. I've used the example of family violence, but we also see it in other gender-based violence situations, such as sexual assault, criminal harassment, where there has been a lot of work done in at least the last decade in terms of expanding the provision of services to very specific minority groups.

I know that when provinces and territories apply for their funding—and my colleague, Cyndi Fuss, can elaborate on this if you—they focus on underserved victims and victims from minority groups, so in terms of language, race or religion. These are being supported.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now for two and a half minutes we go to Mr. Fortin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will address the representatives of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Mr. Westmacott or Ms. Wallace-Capretta, I would like to come back to the issue of restorative measures.

What is being done in our penitentiaries, currently, to go further?

Have you thought of any other measures that might increase offenders' awareness of the impact of their crimes on victims?

[*English*]

**Mr. Chad Westmacott:** I'm going to turn to my colleague, Kirstan, for a response on this one.

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** I think the parole officers play a role, whether it be in the community or the institution, in working with the offenders. They are one of our referral agents for restorative opportunities and that philosophy behind how we work with inmates. That includes dynamic security and working through issues within the institutions.

I'll turn it over to Katherine quickly to add some detail.

**Ms. Katherine Cole:** Every offender from their intake works on a correctional plan that they work through during the course of their sentence, which outlines various programs and options for rehabilitation. Those programs are meant to treat criminogenic factors. Rehabilitation takes more than that. That includes accountability and recognition of their crime.

Restorative opportunities is a specific program for those victims and offenders who would like to take part in it. It does have very impactful outcomes. Rehabilitation is something that every offender—and every offender is supported to do so—is working through throughout the course of their sentence.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** Thank you.

Ms. Gagnon, are victims aware of the different restorative programs that offenders participate in and the impact that this may have?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Very briefly.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** If they request this type of information, we provide it to them.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin:** So that's all there is. There are no automatic steps taken to keep victims informed of outcomes related to restorative measures.

Did I understand correctly?

[English]

**Ms. Kirstan Gagnon:** Offenders all have access to an inmate handbook in every institution. There's information available to inmates about restorative justice. Victims are also informed, which was in addition to the CVBR. Victims are all informed as well about restorative justice and our restorative opportunities program through our victim services officers. For our program we get referrals from both offenders and victims.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Cole.

Now for two and a half minutes we go to Mr. Garrison, please.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I've given notice of motion today to deal with another matter, I'm prepared to forgo my two and a half minutes here, as this study will be ongoing, so we have time to get to my motion. If the committee will indulge me, I have a little bit of a preamble to the motion. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Yes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've given notice of motion regarding coercive controlling behaviour, and I want to provide a preamble, because we haven't discussed this in a public session of the justice committee in this Parliament.

Two years ago, at the beginning of the pandemic, I did one of my regular calls around to social services agencies and police agencies, and I learned that one of the first things that happened was a spike in calls for assistance in intimate partner violence. After discussions with community agencies and the police about how we could best respond, I tabled a private member's bill calling for the criminalization of coercive and controlling behaviour as a tool for earlier intervention in problematic family situations, and as a potential tool for reducing violence in intimate partner relationships.

As I had no luck in the private members' draws in the last two Parliaments, I asked the justice committee if they would consider the issue. There was unanimous support from all parties and we held hearings in the last Parliament. They were very important hearings, and one of the most important outcomes of the hearings

bears repeating: in this country, we still lose one woman every six days to intimate partner violence. We need more supports to deal with this crisis.

At the hearings, we heard how coercive and controlling behaviour is in itself a form of violence, but also how it's almost always a precursor to physical violence. We heard from a wide variety of all kinds of witnesses that Parliament really needed to take the issue more seriously and needed to act.

Almost a year ago, this committee tabled a unanimous report calling for the criminalization of coercive and controlling behaviour, and improving supports for victims of intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, the election call killed that initiative, so today, I'm pleased to move my motion—which members received notice of—that this committee retable the justice committee's unanimous report on coercive and controlling behaviour and ask for a response from the government.

I'm anticipating support from all parties once again. I know everyone acknowledges that this is a crisis—I think “crisis” is the right word—that we need to respond to. By retabling this report, we'll get this back on the agenda of both the House and the government.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Do we have any debate? Do you wish to go to a vote?

(Motion agreed to)

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Chair, I ask that we record that the vote was unanimous once again.

I thank members of all parties for their support on this important motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Garrison. The vote was unanimous.

To all the witnesses, this will conclude the meeting. I want to thank you all for giving your very important testimony at this committee. We look forward to resuming the study shortly.

The meeting is adjourned.









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