

June 11, 2014

Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A4

Attn: Shaila Anwar, Clerk of the Committee

Re: Bill C-479 - *An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fairness for victims)*

Dear Members of the Committee,

The St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety since 1967. The mission of SLSC is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities.

SLSC is pleased to have the opportunity to submit our comments in regard to Bill C-479 for your consideration. Additionally, we propose Rick Sauvé as an expert in this subject to be called to give testimony to the Committee on behalf of our organization. Mr. Sauvé is serving a life sentence. He has worked for many years with life and long term sentenced people both as an In Reach Worker and in the community. He has presented previously to committees in both the House of Commons and the Senate. His extensive experience ensures that his testimony brings value to consideration of legislation such as this.

SLSC notes with concern the proposals in sections 123 and 131 to significantly increase the period of time between reviews for both persons convicted of a violent crime and those whose parole has been revoked. Parole is a very important aspect of reintegration. Extending parole reviews from every two years to every five years in the one instance and from two to four years in the other, will lead to more people being incarcerated for longer periods of time. The extension likely will result in a lack of motivation on behalf of inmates to engage in rehabilitative programming. It may delay their access to appropriate programming and interventions given the scarcity of resources and the priority given to those approaching eligibility dates. The impact may be to create a sense of hopelessness and isolation and a “why bother” attitude. In addition, supportive community links will be strained, if not demolished, by the wait time. None of this is conducive to the good functioning of the institution nor the re-integrative prospects of the prisoner. This is not in the interest of public safety.

Similarly, section 140.1 by giving the Parole Board of Canada the power to cancel a future hearing based on past waivers and/or cancellations denies the prisoner their right to a hearing. It is inherently unfair. The past events may have been triggered by any number of factors and have no relation to future behaviour.

The Bill proposes amendments that present privacy concerns. SLSC is concerned that allowing victims virtually unfettered access to information regarding the inmate's release, location, and conditions could hinder, at best, the successful reintegration of the person if the information is used the wrong way (i.e. spread on social media).

Incarceration is an extremely expensive option in sentence management. The expenditures implicit in these proposals would, in our opinion, be far better invested in effective, evidence-based interventions and reintegration processes.

SLSC supports the need to ensure that victims are not re-victimized. We do not find that it is either necessary or desirable to remove the rights and privileges of convicted persons in order to do so.

SLSC has significant concerns with Bill C-479 and is hopeful that these concerns will be given thoughtful consideration for their long term implications for public safety, in order to achieve our shared goal of keeping our communities safe. Please feel free to contact me on my direct line at 416-434-0096 in any of these regards.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elizabeth" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "White".

Elizabeth White
Executive Director

c. R. Sauvé