



**Name of Policy: The Role of Government**

**Revised Policy Adoption Date:** *SLSC Annual General Meeting, Ottawa, ON, June 6, 2020.*

**Historical Policy Adoption Date:** *SLSC Annual General Meeting, Ottawa, ON, June 6, 2015.*

**Mission and Mandate:** St. Leonard's Society of Canada is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety. The mission of SLSC is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. It:

- a. Endorses evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice;
- b. Conducts research and develops policy;
- c. Supports its member affiliates; and
- d. Advances collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice.

**Purpose of SLSC Policies:** Policies of SLSC are developed in collaboration with affiliate agencies, SLSC's Board of Directors and members, and are ratified at the Annual General Meeting with the express purposes of:

- Identifying criminal justice and related issues relevant to its membership;
- Reflecting SLSC organizational values and social justice goals;
- Articulating SLSC approaches, practices and standards to achieve these goals; and
- Ensuring the good governance of SLSC on matters of legal, administrative and organizational relevance.

**Background:**

SLSC advocates for evidence-based policies and practices that support habilitation, integration, community engagement, and community-based options in response to social and criminal justice issues. In order to achieve effective responses to such issues, SLSC and its members recognize that a collaborative, bi-directional relationship between government and the voluntary sector is critical. This policy was originally adopted in 2015 in keeping with reaching the full potential of its mission and mandate.<sup>1</sup> SLSC continues to seek a positive relationship with the public sector that is both productive and collaborative. The foundation of a healthy and strong relationship is built on a clear understanding of each other's roles. SLSC requires a comprehensive understanding of both the role that government sees itself as fulfilling and the role which SLSC, based on its values<sup>2</sup>, expects all levels of government to perform. For over a century the criminal justice sector in Canada has been strengthened by increasing linkages between voluntary sector organizations, including SLSC, and government.

Throughout Canada's history, criminal justice legislation has wavered between being punitive and 'tough on crime' or humane and evidence informed. Research that has evaluated the effects of 'tough on crime' legislation (e.g. mandatory minimum sentences) has demonstrated that such initiatives are counterproductive to public safety; they increase recidivism rates, often increase prisoners' risk levels,

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<sup>1</sup> Mission and mandate listed above.

<sup>2</sup> SLSC values social responsibility, integrity, vision, commitment, and human worth

fail to act as a deterrent, do not decrease the rate of crime, and overcrowd and exacerbate pre-existing issues within all aspects of the Canadian criminal justice system.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, messages stating that communities are not safe and that the government must apply ever harsher penalties create fear. They generate an unrealistic level of public apprehension, which again is counterproductive to public safety. Measured responses to crime by government will keep its significance in proportion to its gravity in the context of our social system.

Experts in social and criminal justice have identified root causes of criminal behaviour and have demonstrated appropriate, effective results and responses to individual and systemic issues.<sup>4</sup> Many service providers have had increased success in rehabilitating and integrating individuals, ultimately improving public safety outcomes resulting from continued refinement of evidence-based practice and the breadth of knowledge within sociological and criminological literature. Additionally, there are great financial costs associated with implementing the legislation and addressing its outcomes, which could be better used for evidence-based prevention and treatment.<sup>5</sup>

### **Issues/Scope:**

The need to address public safety and criminal justice is bipartisan and remains constant. Collaboration with the voluntary sector is fundamental to the role of government when working comprehensively to address social and criminal justice matters, as confirmed in *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector*.<sup>6</sup> It is integral when identifying and legislating best practices that the government seek out the expertise of individuals and organizations in the area of interest. All Canadians benefit from governments that include the voices of those who have been and will be most impacted by legislation.

Crime in and of itself is a complex sociological issue, and it is in the best interest of all Canadians that all levels of government collaborate with the voluntary sector to address effectively the complex needs of its – often most vulnerable – citizens. This has been demonstrated historically by the disproportionate representation of people with mental health problems and illnesses and Indigenous/racialized people within the criminal justice system, as well as those impacted by other marginalizing issues defined through lenses of poverty, literacy, addictions, and gender, for example, which have multi-faceted implications related to crime. Both criminal and social justice at all levels of government merit engagement with the voluntary sector.

The Canadian model of federalism divides responsibility for programs and services between the federal government and the provinces. For criminal justice and corrections this division has created a complex and difficult to manage situation. Sentences over two years are federal; but, as soon as a person leaves a prison, even while under federal mandate, the person's health care and other fundamental services become the responsibility of the province and/or municipality. Navigating this division of responsibilities and other discrepancies is essential.

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<sup>3</sup> Cook, A. N. & Roesch, R. (2012). "Tough on Crime" Reforms: What Psychology Has to Say About the Recent and Proposed Justice Policy in Canada. *Canadian Psychology*, 53(3), 217-225.

<sup>4</sup> Cook & Roesch. (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Cook & Roesch. (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Voluntary Task Force. (2001). *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector*. Government of Canada.

Throughout history, Canada has enjoyed periods of positive profile for its approach to crime and corrections based on its emphasis on habilitation, community engagement, and sanctions that take place in the community. These elements remain central to a positive and productive role for the government in addressing the public safety impacts of the criminal justice system on its citizens.

**Resolutions:**

Be it resolved that St. Leonard’s Society of Canada:

- Promotes the role of the Canadian government in protecting public safety, and reiterates the importance of coordinated, evidence-based habilitation initiatives and community partnerships to achieve the successful integration of sentenced persons as law-abiding members of the community.
- Advocates for the role of government as one that engages in partnership and dialogue with stakeholders/interested groups and people, operates transparently, and functions in a values-based manner.
- Strives to achieve synergy among all levels of government and the voluntary social justice sector in order to achieve mutual goals and outcomes.
- Advocates for Canadian justice policies and practices to be grounded in research and reflective of experiences of Canadians impacted by the criminal justice system.
- Advocates for measured responses to crime that are proportional to their impact on Canada’s social system.
- Advocates for each level of government to ground its effort in the areas of criminal justice and corrections within the principles of habilitation, community integration, and community engagement.

**Additional Information**

**SLSC Reports/Publications:**

- St. Leonard’s Society of Canada. (2015). [Role of Government Background Paper](#). Ottawa, ON: St. Leonard’s Society of Canada.

**External Reports/Publications:**

- Cook, A. N. & Roesch, R. (2012). “Tough on Crime” Reforms: What Psychology Has to Say About the Recent and Proposed Justice Policy in Canada. *Canadian Psychology*, 53(3), 217-225.
- Voluntary Task Force. (2001). *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector*. Government of Canada. Retrieved from <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/CP32-75-2001E.pdf>