



Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan

November 14, 2011

Honourable Brad Wall
Premier of Saskatchewan
Room 226, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Honourable Don Morgan
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Room 355, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Honourable D.F. (Yogi) Huyghebaert
Minister of Corrections, Public Safety, and
Policing. Room 38, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Honourable Donna Harpauer
Minister of Education
Room 348, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Honourable Don McMorris
Minister of Health
Room 302, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Honourable June Draude
Minister of Social Services
Room 346, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Premier, Sirs, and Madams,

On behalf of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan, I would like to congratulate your government on its recent victory in our provincial election. We look forward to working with you on issues of mutual concern. One such issue, that requires immediate action, is The Safe Streets and Communities Act (Bill C-10), which is currently being debated in Ottawa. Provincial Ministers in Ontario and Quebec have already expressed concern about the dire fiscal and social consequences of this bill; we ask the Government of Saskatchewan to do the same.

The punitive nature of Bill C-10, especially the mandatory minimum sentence provisions, would guarantee an influx of prisoners to our provincial prisons, which are already overcrowded, and create an even larger backlog in our provincial courthouses. These issues will lead to higher costs for our province and its citizens.

As you know, our provincial jails are comprised mainly of people who have mental health concerns or come from backgrounds of poverty, abuse, and addiction. Many are First Nations/Metis people who are caught up in the criminal justice system due to the cyclical repercussions of colonization (According to research done by the Native Women's Association of Canada). In Saskatchewan, we have observed that many provincially sentenced prisoners have literacy levels below grade 6 and were homeless prior to incarceration. Most of the women we work with are survivors of physical or sexual abuse. Addressing these concerns through education, housing initiatives, and addictions treatment is a cheaper and a far more effective strategy for addressing crime than tougher sentencing. A study, cited on the Government of Canada's website, found that harsher criminal justice sanctions actually increased recidivism and recommended research-based rehabilitation programs as an alternative¹. Similarly, policy makers in the United States have realized that jailing more people for longer periods of time is costly and ineffective.

Experts across North America are calling on the Canadian government to abandon Bill C-10. On October 17, 2011, the Canadian Bar Association issued a news release that states Bill C-10 "is contrary to what is known to lead to a safer society, and would move Canada along a road that has failed in other countries, at great expense". Jailing more people when our communities are becoming safer is nonsensical. Statistics Canada data reveals that, nationally, the crime rate has been declining and is at its lowest level since 1973. For these reasons, Canadian taxpayers are telling us they would rather have billions spent on effective programming than on a punishment model that will inevitably have harmful long term effects on communities and families.

As an organization that has 30 years of experience working with women who have been criminalized, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan is not only concerned about the fiscal cost of Bill C-10 but the social and human impact, especially on those who are most marginalized. We respectfully ask the Saskatchewan government to speak out against Bill C-10.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Dr. Nancy Poon
Chair, Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan Board of Directors

¹ http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cor/sum/_fl/cprs200205-eng.pdf