

Media Advisory – December 14, 2007

“Reaction to the CSC Review Panel Report”

A first look at the report of the Review Panel report reveals that members dealt with a vast range of concerns during the course of their deliberations. That they have produced in such short order a comprehensive document with 109 recommendations is a significant achievement in the view of the St. Leonard's Society of Canada. It should serve as a springboard for substantive discussions among government and key stakeholders about appropriate measures to be taken in a deliberative response to the work.

A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety prescribes an approach to federal corrections which it intends to have 'mirror' life in Canadian Society. But the prison environment is not the same as the community. And prisoners are not necessarily representative of mainstream Canadian society. Prisoners tend to be less well-educated, have greater prevalence of substance abuse histories, and fewer supports than other Canadians. Implementation of any new program models must remain consistent with the evidence-based best practices for which Canada has long been known and which are turned to by countries around the world as effective means to work with sentenced men and women, states Elizabeth White, Executive Director.

The Panel has clearly given great thought to the wealth of information provided to them on the wide range of topics under its terms of reference and has proposed extensive changes. St. Leonard's Society, with its national network of community-based day programs and residential services which for 45 years have contributed to safe reintegration, is pleased to note the Panel's unequivocal support for the key role played by community corrections in ensuring public safety. The 'Outside the Walls' recommendations, provided that they are adequately resourced and developed in open collaboration with the community-based experts on the provision of community-based corrections, will provide a robust platform for safe reintegration of the more than 90% of prisoners who will be released back into the community.

However, cautions White, the Report raises serious concerns in crucial areas. Economies of scale aside, there is little evidence that a program of prison building is needed in Canada, nor that the proposed regional complexes would be a desirable model. The proposal to make "offender accountability" a principle in the legislation seems an unnecessary addition. And the proposed abolition of statutory release is a huge step away from what has been a model conditional release system. Legislative changes of this nature are not likely to enhance our laws nor contribute to a safer Canada.

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