

Increased Sentences for Repeat Offenders

In 1971, the Government of Canada changed the approach taken towards convicted criminals. The Minister responsible stated in the House that “--- we have decided from now on to stress the rehabilitation of individuals rather than the protection of society.” This approach has prevailed ever since.

The rationale stated for this change was that at least 80 per cent of inmates can be rehabilitated. However, this simplistic approach does not deal with the remainder of the criminal population, where efforts at rehabilitation generally are not successful. That small group is responsible for a large amount of the crime which is inflicted upon the citizens of Canada as well as businesses and other organizations in this country.

To reduce crime, Canada needs to deal more strongly with chronic crime offenders who routinely receive light sentences that do not escalate with the number of convictions. Increasing and escalating prison sentences will provide a greater deterrent to these criminals and will at least protect the public by preventing these criminals from victimizing more citizens.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has acknowledged that research shows a minority of offenders commit the majority of crime, and that many of these individuals are chronic offenders. The Association has called upon the Federal Minister of Justice to amend the Criminal Code to make bail more difficult to achieve for these criminals, and to mandate increasing sentences for chronic offenders so as to decrease victimization.

The problem of chronic offenders is illustrated by the results of an analysis carried out by several police departments which is illustrated by the Vancouver Police Department work. The Department reported that it was monitoring 379 chronic offenders who on average had 39 convictions during the period 2001-2006, for a total of nearly 15,000 convictions. Most chronic offenders are middle-aged, and have been stealing for decades to fund drug addiction.

Further analysis showed significant losses by both residents and businesses as a result of theft in the City of Vancouver and is estimated at over \$125,000,000. When combined with probable losses from other major urban centres, this is a major economic loss to all Canadians. In addition, by having longer sentences for chronic offenders, there is significant savings in terms of police and judicial costs from not having more frequent crimes, arrests and trials.

Any movement toward having repeat offenders sentenced to longer terms should be coupled with a comprehensive approach that provides more and better treatment for drug addicts and supports other prevention measures.

The simple fact is this, if repeat offenders are not on the street, they can't break into our houses and businesses, steal our cars and threaten our safety. The justice system needs to focus on the rights and freedoms of victims, as well as the rights and freedoms of criminals. Longer sentences for repeat offenders should be enacted.

To achieve that balance, an amendment is required to Section 718.2 (a) of the Criminal Code, which addresses “other sentencing principles”. This section speaks to aggravating and mitigating factors that need to be considered before imposing a sentence.

Recommendation

That the federal government amend section the appropriate section of the Criminal Code by adding the following clause:

'S718.2(a)(vi) evidence that the offence committed is part of a continuing pattern or history of criminal convictions that indicates that the public interest may be served by an increased length of incarceration'