

## A Realistic Approach to Reducing Crime in Canada

Over the past few years, crime and its impact on businesses and communities) has become one of the most important issues for Canadian Chamber members across the Canada.

While it is recognized that crime in Canada as a whole has seen a decline in crime in recent years, some regions have witnessed increased criminal activity, and overall it remains a significant issue for the business community. One prominent concern is the lack of a focused, coordinated national approach to both the impact of crime and its effect. The Canadian Chamber believes that there are two primary goals on which government should focus to have a significant and lasting impact on reducing crime rates:

- Identifying and tackling the root causes of crime
- Identifying and correcting capacity issues and inefficiencies in the application and prosecution of justice on a national level.

Improving Canada's record with respect to crime will require a concerted effort among all levels of government; police; prosecutors; the judiciary; those responsible for the treatment of drug addiction, mental health, housing the homeless; health authorities, and educators. There is a need for a consultative and cooperative approach involving all of these parties in a national effort with a corresponding commitment of adequate resources.

These are significant challenges that cannot be addressed by one level of government, but rather by a coordinated, truly national strategy.

While the administration of the court system (for example, the need for Crown Counsel to lay charges and the delays in disposing of cases) is only within the jurisdiction of the provincial/territorial governments, the challenges with regards to sentencing and the other substantive provisions of the *Criminal Code* are under federal jurisdiction. Without a collaborative approach, we will not be successful.

The Canadian Chamber believes these types of issues can best be addressed effectively through the creation of a Criminal Justice Task Force with a focused mandate.

While the Canadian Chamber recognizes that significant changes to the *Criminal Code* have been introduced and many resources dedicated to this issue, without a more structured approach these changes and investments could very well prove to be limited in their impact on the wider, more national stage. The creation of a Task Force would be a cost-effective reordering of existing resources (a key concern for the Canadian Chamber given the current fiscal situation) that would allow for a more coordinated approach to government spending. This would lead to better outcomes and a more fiscally-effective use of government resources across the treatment, prosecution and incarceration spectrum.

The key to the success of the Task Force will be the level to which the individuals, and the Task Force as a whole, are free from political interference. The Task Force should be comprised of senior individuals from all levels of government and the criminal justice community. They need to be charged with a specific outcome and timetable to ensure that goals are met in an efficient manner and predictable timeframe.

While the recommendations of the Task Force will be the result of substantive consultation and research, the Canadian Chamber believes that a cornerstone of a national strategy must be measures to address certain critical areas including but not be limited to:

- Increased levels of policing
- Adequate prosecution resources
- Improved sentencing guidelines, including escalating sentences for chronic offenders

- Revision of public policy underlying the *Criminal Code* to re-emphasize the protection of society and the responsibility of individuals for their criminal behaviour
- Improved treatment for addictions and mental health
- Addressing of the underlying social conditions and influences that contribute to the severity of the problem.

Cities are beginning to develop crime reduction strategies in an effort to address the root causes of crime in individual communities. We applaud their efforts, however, in order to reach its maximum effect and sustainability, a national crime reduction strategy is required that will be implemented in every province, territory and region in Canada.

### **Recommendation**

That the federal government work with other levels of government to create a Criminal Justice Task Force, isolated from political interference, that is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive national integrated crime reduction strategy to address the core issues and challenges facing the criminal justice system across the local, provincial and federal levels.