



Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

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Submission on Bill C-10, Safe Streets and Communities Act

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The Canadian Friends Service Committee is pleased to respond to Bill C-10, the *Safe Streets and Communities Act*. Established in 1931, Canadian Friends Service Committee acts on the peace and social concerns of the Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

As a religious charity with a strong commitment to the spiritual imperative of working for peace and justice, we support the Government of Canada in searching for ways to keep our streets safe. However, we are deeply concerned that Bill C-10, contrary to its title, will lead Canada away from this goal.

Quakers have a long tradition of engagement with justice issues. We are committed to communities of safety, peace and justice. Our faithful engagement with concerns about jails and justice is rooted in our belief that there is that of God in every person. We promote restorative justice models wherein those most affected are meaningfully engaged in the process, where concerns of those who have been harmed by crime are met, and where those who have committed crimes learn the impact of the harms they have caused and are supported to work towards restoration and safe reintegration into their community.

Our experiences of working in prisons, providing chaplaincy and dispute resolution training, and in communities with victims and offenders, lead us to be deeply concerned. Four of the nine parts of Bill C-10 propose longer sentences, two introduce higher financial penalties, and three complicate reintegration of offenders into communities. We support the positions of the Mennonite Central Committee Canada¹ and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children,² concerning Bill C-10. In particular, we note that the Bill undermines Canada's obligations at international law under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³

¹ Mennonite Central Committee Canada, <http://ottawa.mcc.org/advocate-change-bill-c-10>

² Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, <http://rightsofchildren.ca/young-people-and-bill-c-10>

³ Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

It has been well documented that longer sentences are not effective in deterring crime, rehabilitating those who have committed crimes, or protecting and supporting those who have been harmed by crime. This is the conclusion of groups as varied as the Church Council on Justice and Corrections⁴ (of which the Religious Society of Friends is a founding member) and the Canadian Bar Association.⁵ This conclusion is also supported by the American organisation Right on Crime⁶. The costs of lengthening sentences will have tremendous financial impact on all levels of government, when the evidence shows no correlation between time spent in prison and better correctional outcomes.⁷ Furthermore, program funding allocations that will flow forth from the new policy directives established by Bill C-10 and that focus solely on those who have caused harm will leave less resources to support those victims of crime who have been harmed and will diminish resources from vital community initiatives which address the root causes of crime.

Our experience shows that opportunities which offer community connections for those who have caused harm reduce recidivism and are proven to create safer communities. We echo the statement of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, “that the Omnibus crime bill not be tabled or passed as it now exists but rather that tax dollars are spent instead on public housing, child care, pensions, health care (including mental health), public education, services for victims and other social needs.”⁸

Further, as Quakers, we are united in the value we place on fully informed decision making and thoughtful discernment. As omnibus legislation which has its Parliamentary timeline being driven by a campaign promise, Bill C-10 does not allow Members of Parliament and concerned citizens time to debate and evaluate this far reaching legislation.

In short, Canadian Friends Service Committee disagrees with the punitive spirit of this Bill, and the means by which it has been proposed.

In light of this, we recommend the following:

1. Removing Bill C-10 from the order paper and reintroducing the disaggregated legislation with sufficient time for debate and study.
2. Rejecting policies that aim mainly at punishment, and encourage policies that provide a meaningful focus on assisting persons affected by crime to redress for the losses they have suffered and rehabilitating people who have behaved in harmful ways to ensure that future crime rates continue to fall.⁹ We recommend this focus be based on sound research, and be carried out with the dignity, compassion and respect all human beings deserve.

⁴ Church Council on Justice and Corrections, <http://ccjc.ca/>

⁵ Canadian Bar Association, www.cba.org/cba/submissions/PDF/11-45-eng.pdf

⁶ Right on Crime, <http://www.rightoncrime.com/the-conservative-case-for-reform/statement-of-principles/>

⁷ Doob & Webster. “Sentencing Severity and Crime,” *Crime and Justice*. The University of Chicago Press. V. 30, 2003. <<http://www.jstor.org/pss/1147698>>

⁸ Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, http://www.elizabethfry.ca/caefs_e.htm

⁹ Also see Handy, Janet, “Letter to the Standing Committee on Finance,” Church Council on Justice and Corrections, August 27, 2011. <http://ccjc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/EFry_endorsement_letter.pdf>

3. Supporting the policy suggestions of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children and Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

To maintain safe streets and communities the Government of Canada and Canadians must put resources into building a society that supports people to fulfill their greatest potential rather than into reactive punitive measures.

Sincerely,

Lee Webb
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Clerk of the Quakers Fostering Justice Program Committee of
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