



June 6, 2007

Mr. Robert Sampson,
Chair, CSC Review Panel
C/o Ms. Lynn Garrow
Secretariat, CSC Review Panel
Suite 1210, 427 Laurier Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1A 1M3

Dear Mr. Sampson,

Re: CSC Review Panel Consultation

Thank you for your letters of April 25 and May 10, 2007. The Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC) is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the issues that lie before this Panel. We would like to take this opportunity to provide an introduction to our organization, highlighting our long history of collaboration with CSC.

The CCJC is a national and bilingual non-governmental non-profit organization incorporated in 1974. Eleven supporting church denominations and religious organizations as well as a growing number of other individuals and community groups share our values and interest in justice issues. We strive to increase community awareness and shared knowledge of criminal justice and public safety matters. We aim at enhancing the role of citizens in activities that contribute to the healing of victims, offenders, and communities affected by crime.

Our focus is on the human realities that people in our communities are struggling with related to crime, its causes and effects, and the repercussions of how our justice system and society generally deal with crime. Our approach is to put stories and a human face to the label of victim and offender. We present our audiences with accurate information about statistics, research, and effective programs for prevention, support, supervision and care, bearing in mind the needs of all parties affected.



The CCJC has a long history of consultation and joint endeavours with CSC. Our members have served over the past 33 years in many capacities supportive of CSC initiatives, roundtables, consultations and study groups. We have often been invited to speak at CSC-sponsored Commissioner's Forums, training and retreat sessions and conferences – on family violence; on safe community options to reduce the use of incarceration; on fear and risk; on individualized release planning; on women's issues, mental health issues, In-reach to lifers; on human rights and community engagement; on bridging the gap between prisoners and their communities; on family support, and on support for correctional officers. We were also one of the very first NGOs to draw attention to victims' issues and help resource the initial national gatherings about this in the 1980's.

It is primarily by education, advocacy and community development initiatives that we foster healthier communities and crime prevention through restorative approaches. We have produced a number of specialized materials that promote community education and engagement. We are also the community sponsor for the Collaborative Justice Program at the Ottawa Courthouse, which has been pioneering restorative responses to serious crime. Our Quebec group has been very active in the development of Rencontres Détenus-Victimes (RDV) which brings victims and prisoners together into safe encounters with the support of community members. These encounters have been building bridges of understanding, compassion and mutual respect which many have found helpful to their healing and recovery from the trauma of crime. CCJC is also an important partner of CSC in producing resources for sensitization of faith communities for Restorative Justice Week, and facilitating CSC's Chaplaincy's connection with local communities.

All of our activities and resources are aimed at informing the constituencies we serve. They provide a wealth of experience to respond to the concerns of the Review Panel, namely:

Availability and Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Programming

Our members who volunteer in the present Federal System report that there is not enough programme space to conduct appropriate programming and it is a challenge to move the prisoners. Increases in the prisoner count are counterproductive in this case.

The current trend to adopt mandatory sentencing and reduce or discontinue conditional and statutory release presents a challenge to program design and access. Within the context of the Federal setting, it may become difficult for stakeholders to



access prisoners; the environment itself may generate a less effective place to deliver programs. The consequences of augmenting prison population must be considered. These include increased violence within correctional institutions and decreased compliance as the incentive of release is removed.

Initial Placement of Murderers in Maximum Security

The policy of initially placing murderers in maximum security ignores the reality that different cases should be treated differently. Assessing each case with consideration to its particularities does not mean granting preferential treatment. Instead, it means using the same tools to place individuals accordingly in the system. Maximum Security should not be automatic, but used when the risk is assessed as warranted. Murder trials are lengthy and should provide enough information about a Federal inmate. Usually, the pre-sentence period can determine whether maximum security is required initially. Placing a murderer in an inappropriate environment may hinder rehabilitation and affect the process of safe transition back into society.

Location of Community Correctional Centres and Parole Offices

Community Correctional Centres should correspond to the background of the inmate. We find that people re-integrate better when they are close to their supports. If it is important to return the prisoner to Canadian society, it is of little help to isolate them far from their family, work and medical points of reference.

Gradual Release

The CCJC has a long tradition of restorative justice practices and encourages gradual release. This process allows offenders time to adjust to their non-prison surroundings and provides support when there is a risk of re-offense. Supervision is an important part of the release process if we are sincere in our desire to reduce recidivism.

Infrastructure Renewal

The CCJC is not in a position to offer expert advice on this matter, except to point out that bigger is not necessarily better. We find that in the provincial super-jail program, challenges remain and are sometimes made worse because fewer staff members are available to facilitate movement. More families relocate and follow their loved ones to



rural areas where there is no work or support for their children. This human impact is important and will cost our communities in future years.

Given our extensive experience interacting with CSC and facilitating its ability to reach out to communities, we strongly feel we could provide this Panel with an opportunity to consult further on issues of special interest. Our members and networks are very engaged across the country with a range of activities and issues related to the Panel's area of review. They work directly in prisons; they support victims, families of offenders, prisoners upon release. They are familiar with some of the obstacles to victim support and to healthy reintegration of offenders. They are very aware of the practical realities of overcrowding and the potential negative impacts of higher rates of imprisonment due to more mandatory minimums, less statutory release, and super-jail concepts of architectural and human management design.

We would be pleased to facilitate your engagement with informed publics who can speak to the specifics of particular issues if and as they arise. We will also be keeping all of our church heads and their constituencies informed of these developments as they may arise as we believe that these issues are related to important concerns of social morality and responsibility.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Griffiths".

Jane Griffiths
President