

David Tilson MP ? Federal government is working on putting victims' rights first



Recently, Prime Minister Stephen Harper launched the eighth annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

This week recognizes the progress made by victims' rights groups across the country to help make the Canadian criminal justice system more responsive to their needs.

Our government has a long history of standing up for victims and supporting their rights. In 2007, we created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, an office solely dedicated to ensuring that victims have a voice and a resource in Ottawa. We also created the Federal Victims Strategy, a package of programs and services that help give victims a voice in the criminal justice system. In addition, we doubled the compensation that convicted criminals must pay to victims.

However, there's still more work to be done. The theme for this year's National Victims of Crime Awareness Week is We All Have a Role. Our government is doing its part and implementing more measures that will build on our previous accomplishments.

We've announced more than \$1.5 million in funding for more than 175 projects across the country that will serve the interests of victims. These projects will help raise awareness about the needs of victims, the role the public can play, and how we can end the stigmatization of victims.

Our government has also begun consultations for our Victims Bill of Rights. These consultations are critical so that we can identify the best way to ensure that victims' rights are properly entrenched into federal law. Doing so will ensure that federal law responds to the rights and needs of victims of crime.

Additionally, James Bezan has taken further steps to help ensure that the criminal justice system takes victims' needs into account by introducing the Respecting Families of Murdered and Brutalized Persons Act. This private member's bill will empower courts to increase the ineligibility date for Canada's most depraved criminals.

Normally, these criminals are technically eligible for parole after 25 years. However, due to the nature of their crimes, their parole is never granted. However, the families of victims are still brought in to unnecessary and bureaucratic parole hearings, forced to relive their experiences for absolutely no reason.

This bill will allow courts to push parole eligibility from 25 years to 40 years. This will eliminate unnecessary parole hearings for people who will never be granted parole and will save victims' families the unnecessary pain of having to relive the experience.

Victims of crime deserve to have a voice in the criminal justice process. The unfortunate reality is that far too often, victims are left behind and forgotten. The particularly sad case of Rehtaeh Parsons highlights the need for strengthening the voices of victims and their families, and supporting their rights.

This is why our government will continue to take action and help ensure that the Canadian justice system puts the rights of victims first.