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# Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

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Chair: James Maloney





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• (1640)

[English]

**The Chair (James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everybody. I would like to call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Pursuant to the order of reference of April 15, 2026, the committee will begin its study of Bill C-231, an act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

The sound tests have been done for the people online. You're both nodding.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not talking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

As a reminder, all comments should be directed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

For the first hour, from 4:45 p.m. to 5:45 p.m., we have appearing today, on Bill C-231, MP Luc Berthold.

Welcome, Mr. Berthold. Thank you for being here today. Thank you for bringing your family with you, and thank you for moving this bill forward. We appreciate that.

We will be joined by Justine Berthold, who is a nurse, I understand, and Caroline Levesque, who is an early childhood educator. We also have Angy Riendeau, a criminologist, who will be providing some evidence as well.

As I said, we'll have a panel for 60 minutes, which will take us to about 5:45 p.m., and then we will proceed to clause-by-clause.

Mr. Berthold, I don't really need to explain the procedure to you, sir. You know it as well as or better than I do. The floor is yours.

**Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Maloney.

[Translation]

I want to thank all my fellow members for being here to study Bill C-231, known as the friends of David bill, which would replace an ineffective punitive approach with early intervention focused on the treatment and mental health of youth.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say a few words of thanks.

We are here studying this bill today thanks to a number of people, namely my spouse, Caro, my daughters, Marie-Soleil and Justine, and our daughter-in-law, Audrey.

When I started talking about the bill, a lot of people sent me messages and shared their stories in support of the bill. Even before that, when tragedy occurred in my son David's case, we received many messages of support from people who kept us going and encouraged us to turn what happened into something positive. I want to thank them.

One of the people who shared their experience with me was Angy Riendeau, who is here today. She told me she would be there if she could ever provide her support as a professional. I don't want to give her presentation for her, but I do want to sincerely thank her for being here.

I want to thank everyone at the House of Commons who worked on the bill. I'm not a lawyer, so legal terminology isn't my forte. I couldn't have done this without them. They knew when to rein me in, because when you're trying to change things, you want to go faster than you should sometimes. I might have put things in the bill that weren't compliant with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, simply because I wanted to go faster and save as many young people as possible. Thanks to them and their good advice, however, we were able to achieve something I think has the potential to make a difference in the lives of many young people.

I also want to thank everyone in the government who worked on this bill. I want to thank Justice Minister Sean Fraser for supporting the bill, everyone in cabinet, and everyone at the justice department who helped draft the amendments before the committee. I have examined them, and they will help move the bill forward.

I want to thank my Conservative colleagues for their support every step along the way. Thank you to Larry Brock, our critic and shadow minister for justice, who has been beside me this whole time.

I also want to thank my Bloc Québécois, Liberal, NDP and Green Party colleagues for their unanimous support for the bill at second reading in the House. It was very emotional and moving to see the House of Commons stand united as one to help young people dealing with this type of situation. This is about David, but it's also about the friends of David. We'll have an opportunity to talk more about them shortly.

I'm going to be honest with you. I had a rather hard time preparing my remarks for today, which is why you don't have my statement in writing. When you pour your heart out once, as I did at second reading, it's hard to repeat yourself and say those same things again. Just about all of you were there. I'm probably going to say the same things I said then, but I want you to know how grateful I am to you for listening.

As I said in my speech and throughout my remarks, I am not the only one responsible for this. My spouse, Caro, my daughters, Marie-Soleil and Justine, and I stood together in drafting this bill. I wanted them to be here today. They usually can't come to the House and be wherever, so I told them to come and share their story with my colleagues in the House of Commons.

Bill C-231, the friends of David bill, is about helping young people, rather than punishing them. It is a bill I hope will bring all actors in the justice system to think about treatment options. Drug use is a symptom of something else. A friend might introduce someone to drugs for the first time. Someone might use drugs because of a mental health issue or a relationship problem. The causes are many. If we focus solely on the drug use, the inclination is to slap the person on the wrist, and tell them that they're not allowed to do what they're doing and that they have to get off drugs, period. The police have so much on their plate that even they will tell a drug user at some point that they'll let it go this time, but that the person has to get off drugs.

Perhaps things would have turned out differently for my son David had something been done when he was younger, had he been arrested or had it been possible to make him get treatment. I say "make him" because a 14-, 15- or 16-year-old doesn't want treatment or think they need it. They don't think they need help, because they can quit on their own. They think they'll be fine, so they tell their father not to worry. That's not true for everyone.

Treatment works for some people. I have friends who did drugs in high school who went on to become business leaders and high-ranking people, after managing to get completely off drugs themselves.

For some, however, that isn't possible. I am doing this for them. For the friends of David, as I call them, even though David doesn't know all the people we are going to help. It is for them that we chose to create this avenue and tell the justice system that we want it to look after these people as early as possible.

Instead of repeating more of the same, I just want to say something from the bottom of my heart. We can do things together, and

we can do them well. All the parties came together to make this bill acceptable to everyone, with the same goal in mind. As I said, if we are able to save just one young person, that alone will be something, but my goal is to save more than one.

Thank you very much. I am happy to answer your questions.

● (1650)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Ms. Levesque, I understand you're going to speak next.

[*Translation*]

**Caroline Levesque (Early Childhood Educator, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, my name is Caroline Levesque, and I am David's mother. I am an early childhood educator.

**Justine Berthold (Nurse, As an Individual):** My name is Justine Berthold. I am a nurse and David's younger sister.

**Caroline Levesque:** Although she isn't here, I do want to mention our other daughter, Marie-Soleil, who is in England. She helped prepare this joint statement.

Inaction has serious consequences, profound and irreversible consequences. In our family, those consequences have a story, a face and a name, David.

Bill C-231 may have been life-changing for David. The bill alone may not have fixed everything, but as parents, we believe with our hearts and souls that it could have made a difference. We believe that it would have provided an opportunity for someone to intervene and say that they weren't going to turn their back on him, that they were going to help him.

On February 10, 2025, our son took his life. That day, we lost a young man, two children lost a father, a wife became a widow much too early, and two sisters lost a brother. Not a day goes by when we don't miss David. As parents, we have a lot of emotions, tremendous sadness, of course, but anger too. We are angry at the system, which didn't help him in his time of need. We are angry at society, which all too often turns a blind eye to the problem or responds too late. I can humbly say that we are also angry at ourselves, because we still wonder to this day whether we could have done something different.

**Justine Berthold:** However, as we were suffering and as people were sharing their stories with us, we came to believe one thing: We weren't alone.

David had friends, young people like him, struggling with the same things, the same addiction, the same silence. There were friends he knew, others he didn't; friends who introduced him to drugs; friends who show others how to take refuge in drugs; friends who are suffering without knowing it; friends who themselves have parents who don't know what to do. It is also for them that we are here today. Behind every story like David's, there are others—too many others.

**Caroline Levesque:** What we came to understand is that substance abuse among young people is not just about a pattern of behaviours, a bad decision or a wrong turn along the way. It is often a symptom of deeper suffering, a feeling of ill-being that hasn't been seen, heard or addressed.

All too often today, the system uses the wrong tools to address that reality, responding late, inappropriately or sometimes not at all.

When a young person comes before the justice system, the focus is usually on the offence. The most important question isn't always asked: How did that young person get there? Their actions are dealt with, but not the cause.

**Justine Berthold:** Bill C-231 is not the be-all and end-all, but it does propose something vital: the real possibility that young people will be referred to a treatment program at the right time, before the situation gets worse. Time is of the essence. The more time goes by, the more substance use takes hold, and the more substance use takes hold, the harder it is to overcome.

Meanwhile, families wait, search, knock on doors, but all too often, those doors stay closed or don't open until it's too late.

**Caroline Levesque:** What we are asking for today is not more punishment, but better help. Our daughter and Justine's older sister, Marie-Soleil, is watching this from England, where she is right now. To her, this bill is about recognizing that some youth are not offenders in need of correctional measures; they are young people in distress in need of help. This bill is about giving judges, police and other stakeholders real tools to help put these young people on the path to healing. It's also about sending a clear message: No young person struggling with addiction should be left to fend for themselves.

If this bill helps just one young person, prevents just one tragedy, keeps just one family from having to go through what we went through, it will have done its job.

We can't bring David back, but together, we can do something to help others.

• (1655)

**Justine Berthold:** We can do something to help his friends, all those young people who are suffering in silence, all those families who still have hope.

**Caroline Levesque:** Respectfully and with every fibre of my being as a mother, I am asking you to support this bill. Let's make it so that these young people's stories can have a different outcome.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you for sharing his story with us today.

I'll go to Ms. Riendeau for five minutes, and then we'll go to questions.

[Translation]

**Angy Riendeau (Criminologist, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, let me first say that I sympathize with what MP Luc Berthold, his wife, Caroline Levesque, and their family have been going through since their son's death in February 2025. As someone who works with youth and families, I fully understand the desire to do something so that others won't have to experience what they did.

No one can oppose legislation that seeks to provide young people with better support at such a complex stage of development as adolescence. We all want the same thing: to protect young people before they get caught up in delinquent behaviour, develop addiction or become marginalized. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that establishing substance abuse as a risk factor or problem that requires treatment has to go hand in hand with careful expert assessment.

The reality is that most teens who are arrested are released on a promise to appear or summons. They will never have access to the comprehensive assessment that will inform the court as to the needs-based measures it should impose. That is the real problem, as far as I'm concerned.

It is equally important to keep in mind that we shouldn't just intervene quickly when substance use is the apparent problem. The needs of young people can be many and, in some cases, can go much deeper. They may have issues related to violence, sexuality, the development of empathy, trauma, mental health, rejection, attachment or distress. Substance abuse can be the visible symptom of a much more complicated feeling of unease. That is precisely why it's important to be able to quickly and carefully identify what the young person in question really needs in their specific circumstances. The goal should not be to target one type of problem that a treatment program can address. Rather, it should be to make comprehensive assessments available, so that the issues truly jeopardizing the young person's well-being and development can be addressed.

In my private criminology practice, I work with young people and families during a crucial period, one the system often overlooks: the time between the arrest—ideally, the first arrest—and the court hearing. This period can last a while. The families are often at a loss. Parents don't understand the court proceedings or the conditions imposed on their child. The young person is often under the misguided belief that their life is over because of the criminal charges. Without immediate support, structured help, or a risk and needs-based intervention plan, what happens all too often is the parent-child relationship starts to crumble, the young person offends again and the delinquent trajectory worsens.

Young people often say to me, “Angy, if you weren't there, I would feel like my life was over.” Some young people use this time to reflect, go back to school, start treatment or show the court that they feel a real sense of responsibility.

Ethically, what I have a very tough time with is that these services are primarily available in the private sector. The families that get specialized support are usually the ones who can afford it. Young people's needs should never depend on how much money their family has. In fact, research on juvenile delinquency shows that poverty and social inequality are major risk factors for adolescent delinquency, especially when coupled with social exclusion, a failure to remain in school, chronic family stress, and limited access to supports and prevention resources.

At this point, I wonder whether the solution lies in changing the legislation or, rather, understanding and implementing existing provisions in the Youth Criminal Justice Act, or YCJA.

The YCJA already provides a number of intervention options. Under the YCJA, before sentencing, the court can impose conditions and order follow-up measures tailored to the young person's needs. Section 91 stipulates that a young person may be released from custody in order to participate in a specified program or attend a treatment program. The court can order therapy programs or outpatient treatment. The problem is there aren't enough resources. There aren't enough expert assessments. There aren't enough community-based services. Above all, the measures aren't fully utilized. Legislative tools exist, but they are underutilized.

One that comes to mind is the convening of conferences provided for in section 19 of the YCJA. Those conferences allow for an interdisciplinary approach that can inform court decisions, but they are hardly used.

Keep in mind as well that Quebec usually addresses these situations from a health and social services standpoint, whereas other provinces take an approach that is more corrections or facility-based. Those different approaches directly influence the practices and interventions used, and the way the system deals with young people.

- (1700)

Studies on juvenile delinquency, however, demonstrate the importance of early intervention, in accordance with the principles of timeliness, accumulation and diversification of risk factors. The earlier the intervention, the greater our chances of preventing the accumulation of difficulties that will eventually lead to persistent criminality in adulthood.

The question, then, may not be solely how to compel a youth to undergo treatment, but rather how to ensure that, upon the first offence, a youth has rapid access to specialized assessment, care and appropriate resources.

We can add as many provisions as we like to a law, but if the resources aren't there, if specialized assessments aren't accessible, if families are left on their own for months, and if community stakeholders don't feel supported to intervene quickly, our mission today will not be achieved.

The youth's well-being must remain at the heart of judicial and social considerations. To achieve this, we must invest just as much in the practical implementation of existing measures as in the legislative amendments themselves.

In closing, I would like to return to the basics. Behind this bill lies immense human suffering. The loss experienced by MP Luc Berthold and his family serves as a powerful reminder of what brings us all here today: No parent should have to wonder whether their child could have been helped sooner.

I firmly believe that this collective effort should lead us to an important question: Do we really need to introduce more new legislative measures, or should we first ensure that the tools, resources and mechanisms already in place can finally be made quickly available to youth and families?

On the ground, practitioners are already seeing teenagers who want to understand what is happening to them, parents desperately seeking help, and families falling apart due to delays, a lack of services and a failure to provide care.

We already know that early intervention can change the course of a young person's life. We know that a young person's needs are many, complex and often invisible at first glance. We know that leaving a teenager alone with their distress for months increases the risks of relapse, disorder and exclusion.

Our collective responsibility today might not be simply to create more provisions, but above all to ensure that, at the first warning sign, a young person can truly access specialized assessment, concrete resources and adults capable of supporting them before the situation deteriorates. Beyond legislation, a rapid response, the quality of human connection and real access to services are often what alter a trajectory.

Thank you for your attention and for the importance you will give to these considerations and this testimony.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go to the first round of questions for six minutes each, starting with Mr. Baber.

[*Translation*]

**Roman Baber (York Centre, CPC):** Luc, my friend, I am truly sorry.

[*English*]

It's the same for Caroline and Justine. Please accept our sincerest condolences. I'm sure that I speak on behalf of all of my committee colleagues, and I'm sure for all of our House of Commons staff as well, in extending deepest condolences for your loss. Please consider me a friend of David.

Unfortunately, addiction is an issue that transcends politics and socio-economic status. It affects so many of us so profoundly.

If I may share a personal element, about 25 years ago, my group of friends lost a friend. Simon Wood, of Richmond Hill, was unable to cope with his addiction and passed away at the age of 22. I'm grateful for the opportunity to send a shout-out to my boys and say that it's really remarkable that I have the privilege of honouring him today.

Unfortunately, the addiction crisis in Canada is out of control throughout our cities, our suburbs and our small towns and villages. It affects our country so profoundly now. When it comes to addiction, we often try to address every cause of addiction rather than the addiction itself. We talk about addiction vis-à-vis housing, social services and employment, but we never, or rarely, talk about the addiction itself or what helps addiction, which is rehabilitation.

I thank you sincerely, Luc, for bringing this bill before us today and for giving us an opportunity to perhaps save lives. I couldn't think of a more worthwhile thing to do as a member of this committee.

I'll do a bit of work now and run very quickly through what your bill seeks to do.

My understanding is that your bill would allow youth courts, in cases involving offences related to controlled substances or cannabis, to delay sentencing so that a young person can participate in a substance abuse treatment program. It would also allow youth courts to make orders requiring attendance in an addiction treatment program as part of a sentence, but it specifies that failing or refusing to complete such a program cannot in and of itself result in a custodial sentence. Finally, your bill is designed to expand the role of addiction treatment within the Youth Criminal Justice Act, ensuring rehabilitation opportunities for young offenders.

Before I proceed, are there any other key components to the bill that I've missed or that you may wish to address, MP Berthold?

• (1705)

**Luc Berthold:** I think you did a great job. I must hire you for putting it into few words. Thank you.

**Roman Baber:** Thank you, MP Berthold.

I will very quickly clarify a number of points that are before us today.

In the first section, the bill essentially provides that if a young person is alleged to have committed an offence that is linked to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act or if there is a link to cannabis, then a police officer “shall consider whether it would be appropriate to refer the young person, with the young person's consent, to an addiction treatment program”.

Am I to understand that this is before any charges are laid?

**Luc Berthold:** There will be a change in the bill that will allow a police officer, a Crown attorney or a judge to refer the young person to treatment. The goal is to make them intervene sooner and not just let the young person go. It's sending a message that they will do something better for the young person if they do something that brings him or her into the system.

For David, the first time he was to accept... It was not a real treatment; he never accepted it, but when he faced a wall for the

first time, that is when he really understood where he was. That was long after he was 18 years old, unfortunately.

We think that if a police officer or someone who intervened earlier had done something, maybe—it's a maybe; we don't know—that could have changed something for David.

I think it's a good idea to provide each and every one with the opportunity. That's the message I will send afterwards, because I'm planning to tour with these changes to convince people to have more interventions, more money and more treatment centres for those who can't afford treatment.

Roman, just stop me. I'm an MP, and I'm used to using up my time.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Baber.

Ms. Lattanzio, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

**Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us today. I'd especially like to thank David's immediate family for sharing this very personal and emotional experience with us. I'd also like to congratulate them on the work they've done so far. I can tell them that this bill has resonated with me, too, in a certain way.

I will direct my questions to you, Mr. Berthold.

I know that David's memory lies at the heart of this bill, as you have mentioned several times today. Could you explain what you hope this legislation will bring to young Canadians and their families?

**Luc Berthold:** Of course, I can tell you about what I am seeking and share and what we've been through. I'd like to invite my wife to add her own comments if she wishes.

What we experienced was a kind of indifference. It starts with a small amount of use that you don't even notice—a joint every now and then. Your child stays out later. The first time, they come home from a party or an outing completely drunk. It starts with alcohol, then moves on to something else. We tell ourselves it's just a youthful phase and that it will pass. That's the parents' initial reaction. We don't realize that something else is going on.

At some point, we get a call, and we realize there are problems at school. Then we got another call: The principal wanted to search his locker at school—but that didn't stop his behaviour. The goal was to prevent him from selling drugs to others or stop others from using them, but nothing was done to tell him he had to stop because he was doing something wrong.

That is what I hope this bill will change. It needs to make those involved realize that this is when they must intervene. It is at this point that we might discover that the young person is using too much and is forced to sell drugs to pay for their own use. Young people don't have unlimited money—and these drugs are expensive. At some point, drugs lead to other crimes, and then to yet more crimes—we must intervene before that happens.

The bill seeks to raise awareness. As I said, once the bill is passed, significant work will be required to raise awareness. We will need to educate police officers, prosecutors, and judges. By enshrining the concept of treatment in the law—and I'm talking not only about treatment for problematic drug use but also for other mental health issues that may affect young people—I believe we can bring about real change.

**Patricia Lattanzio:** Since the introduction of your bill, have any testimonies, discussions with other families, or meetings with front line workers or community organizations reinforced—in your view—the message you are conveying in this bill?

**Caroline Levesque:** On a more personal level, we heard many testimonials. Many people contacted us on Messenger to share their stories and tell us they were supporting us, and that if we wanted and needed testimonials, they would come forward to provide them.

I'm talking about the more personal perspective, but Luc could elaborate a bit more on the professional aspect.

**Luc Berthold:** On a professional level, I had a meeting with the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, which brought together several stakeholders. Everyone welcomed the fact that there was finally a desire to address treatment in the legislation. Currently, that is missing from the law. It was a great meeting. There were suicide prevention workers and representatives from various sectors when I attended this meeting.

I also met with the Réseau d'entraide des Appalaches, a group that works on the front lines. They are street workers. Simply put, these are the street workers who go check on the young people we see lying on a table in the middle of the night or under a tent in the morning. They check to see if these young people are all right and make sure they can move forward with their lives. These people also say we need to talk about this, that elected officials need to talk about it and be made aware of it. They told me that what I was doing would help them.

We did indeed receive many stories from other community organizations afterwards. It's touching and moving every time.

• (1715)

**Patricia Lattanzio:** What role do you think schools, families and community organizations play in this communication process to spread this message?

**Luc Berthold:** I'm going to talk about the future. In the past, I found there was a lack of communication, particularly in David's case, regarding these kinds of issues in high school. Once a student turns 14, school staff are not allowed to speak to their parents without the student's consent. Staff cannot speak to the parents of a student between the ages of 14 and 16—so, we parents cannot get any updates. The staff cannot talk to us and tell us what is going on. That is when parents feel powerless.

That is what happened to us. We didn't know what our child was doing at school during lunch break, because the staff couldn't tell us. The first we heard about it was when our child called to tell us they were emptying his locker. Imagine how we felt as parents when things had already reached that point. It's unbelievable.

So, yes, there's a need to raise awareness in schools. What could the school have done? It could have called the police, but didn't want to penalize the student. Yet that is exactly what needs to be done: there must be an intervention. People think they're being kind and helpful, but they're not. So we need to start by raising awareness in schools.

Next, community organizations need support—that's clear. However, you know as well as I do that when a private member's bill is introduced and says that \$1 billion is needed, it won't be passed without a royal recommendation, and I don't think that much spending would be approved.

This problem is everyone's responsibility, at every level—whether it's families, schools, society or community organizations. In Canada, we cannot simply accept the situation we find ourselves in today and fail to take care of our youth.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Mr. Fortin, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Berthold, Ms. Levesque, Ms. Berthold, and Ms. Riendeau, thank you for being here. Thank you for your courage. When people go through such an ordeal, they may feel like hiding in a closet and not emerging for a long time. You decided to take the bull by the horns. Truly, you have my utmost admiration.

Like my colleagues, I don't have many questions either. Usually, we have important questions for witnesses, and we don't always agree on everything. I won't speak for everyone around the table, but I think we're practically all in agreement on the bill introduced by our colleague Mr. Berthold.

I have long lamented the fact that there is not enough discussion about the issue of mental illness. There are drug problems, of course, but, more broadly, there is also mental illness. We worry, we're concerned and we talk a lot about various health issues like cancer, heart disease and so many others, and we set up programs for those diseases. I'm not against that, of course. These are scourges that must be addressed. However, mental illness is also a scourge, and we don't take it seriously enough.

In fact, I'm echoing what you said. I want you to know that I completely agree with you. I can speak on behalf of the entire Bloc Québécois caucus when I tell you that we were all stunned, moved and troubled by what happened to David. We are fully supportive of the initiative undertaken by our colleague Luc Berthold.

I was listening to Ms. Riendeau's testimony. It's incredible, because it's something we've often encountered here. I've said it many times and I've often pointed it out: there are no resources. As Ms. Riendeau said, we could pass three million bills, but if the resources aren't there, nothing will happen. I hope we'll be able to secure those resources. We know we have widespread budget problems. I don't have to tell you about the state of our hospitals, our schools and even our roads. The fact remains that we must immediately address this issue of funding for the various organizations that assist not only our youth but also the most vulnerable. Even if David had been 35 years old, I believe he still would have deserved society's help. We must do something.

The only question I have, then, pertains to this issue. Do you have a plan of action that outlines what resources our governments can deploy to address these problems, whether in Quebec City, Ottawa or across all Canadian provinces? That is my question.

As for the rest, I feel a great deal of sympathy. Please accept my deepest condolences. You can count on our support for your efforts.

• (1720)

**Luc Berthold:** Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

I was pleased to hear Ms. Riendeau's testimony. Indeed, adding legislative measures is not always the only solution. Why did I propose this solution? It's so that we can start talking about it. If we don't talk about it, no additional resources will be allocated.

We are legislators. We take action; we can introduce bills to raise awareness about mental health.

Earlier, you made a comparison that struck a chord with me. You asked how we were going to go about adding resources. We're not talking about a hospital; we're not talking about a road; we're not talking about infrastructure. That said, what is all this infrastructure for? It's meant to serve people. So, if we don't treat the people who will use it, why are we spending so much money to make sure there are no potholes in the roads? That's really true.

If I may, Mr. Chair, and if everyone agrees, I'd like to take a moment to tell you a story. You will immediately understand just how serious this is; it no mere anecdote.

When David took his own life, we had to intervene. Without going into all the details, I'll just say that, one day, we received a call informing us that he had barricaded himself in the basement and was preparing to attempt suicide for the first time. We then called

the police. He was admitted because he had attempted suicide by taking medication. I mention this because what happened next is such a testament to the problem we have as a society. At the time, David was in a state of crisis and was making threats. We think he tried to stage a "suicide by police". Actually, I don't know what you call it. I don't know if you know what that means. In our case, he showed up at the door with a knife, and then he told the police that they could try to come and get him. He was probably hoping they would shoot him. It was that serious. He barricaded himself in, then managed to escape, but while escaping, he cut his arm. He was bleeding. There was a lot of blood. He was taken to the hospital. A guard was posted at his door, given the state he was in.

At the hospital, we were told that they would treat his physical injuries first before addressing his suicide attempt. That's fine. They gave him plenty of painkillers and everything he needed. Once the bleeding stopped, he developed an infection, and it got worse. The staff said they were taking care of that. So, out of the five or six days he was in the hospital, they treated his physical injuries for four days. After that, as Ms. Riendeau said, they wanted to treat just his drug use, but not the problem behind the use. He was released from the hospital, and he committed suicide two weeks later.

So, what's visible—the bleeding wound—is treated. However, the wound that's bleeding on the inside is not addressed. This illustrates the importance of treatment at a younger age and the importance of doing what we're doing now.

I want to thank Caro, Justine and Marie-Soleil, who is far away, for letting us bare our hearts and spill our guts to explain this to you because it's the only way to change things, since this is a taboo topic. People have asked me if I am not afraid to talk about all this and be targeted. On the contrary, since we've been talking about it, we've seen that so many people have experienced such situations. There are many more than we think. There are many more than any of us realize. Now that we've spoken about it, people are coming to us and talking to us about it. They want to talk about it, but they don't have the opportunity; there's nothing in place.

Yes, it's true that we put a lot of money into fixing what's visible, what's bleeding, but we're not equipped to deal with what's inside.

• (1725)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

We'll go to Mr. Gill for five minutes.

**Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of you.

Please accept our heartfelt and sincere condolences for your loss.

MP Berthold, I know you personally. I sit with you, and I admire you for bringing this bill forward. I know you are a terrific member of Parliament and public servant. You continue to do these things for the betterment of community and society at large. Normally, when these things happen to a family, they lose track, but you are doing a wonderful thing that will bring relief to so many other families. Thank you for that.

Thank you for introducing this important bill, and thank you for your bravery in sharing your family's story.

Addiction is a cycle that affects Canadians from all walks of life. We are seeing that this is a problem not only in Canada but across the world. We all have stories to share, and I think we probably have more than one.

I know that all members around this table agree that it is an important issue. We must do more to break this cycle.

Can you speak more on the importance of having juvenile intervention for at-risk young offenders to prevent lifelong addiction?

**Luc Berthold:** I'll try to give you an answer in English. I'm speaking English because I think we should do something about it throughout Canada, and I want to share the message with all Canadians.

Madame Riendeau just told us that the earlier, the better. I would like her to expand on that.

Before a young person becomes a criminal to pay for drugs or an addiction or because they're not feeling very well inside, we can do something. However, at a certain stage, it's more difficult, because when they're arrested, they will face justice for a crime related to an addiction, and it's a crime that might never have happened if not for the addiction.

If we can intervene when someone is younger and has just tried something with a friend, it's logical. That's why I want to provide this opportunity to a judge. As my wife and Justine said in the beginning, not acting is worse.

Thinking that a juvenile person will just say "okay" to "don't do that".... They don't listen to their parents. I just had to say that to my children, and they did exactly the contrary each and every time. It's the same for all of us. We have no power over that. That's why we need to intervene at a young age.

Do you want to add something?

[*Translation*]

**Angy Riendeau:** You know, the first early contact with the justice system is a risk factor. In fact, one of the challenges we face in 2026 regarding youth crime is that these young people enter the system far too late. There are currently young people involved in gun-related homicides who have never been flagged by any system professional.

Therefore, we must act early because there is an accumulation and escalation of delinquency. It is quite rare for a young person's first offence to be an attempted murder by firearm.

• (1730)

[*English*]

**Amarjeet Gill:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but can I ask you a quick question, MP Berthold? How did the court system fail your son as a youth or as an adult?

**Luc Berthold:** It's like she just said. As a youth, he wasn't arrested. He wasn't facing any kind of.... I don't know how to say it in English.

**Justine Berthold:** Is it "punishment"?

**Luc Berthold:** Yes, punishment. Thank you, Justine.

Because of that, he was just beside the track.

[*Translation*]

**Angy Riendeau:** When it comes to juvenile delinquency, there are two trajectories for young people who engage in delinquent behaviour. Of all the young people who commit offences during adolescence, 95% will not engage in persistent delinquency as adults.

Earlier, the comments made by the member and his family struck a chord with me, as one of the crucial elements is the parent-child bond. It is true that substance use and delinquent behaviour during adolescence can be part of a trajectory, a developmental phase of adolescence that is considered normative. It is extremely difficult for a parent to know how to intervene with their child. They ask themselves the following questions: Is our child going through a normative phase or are we losing them? Should we impose harsher punishments at home?

We don't necessarily need the justice system to intervene, but we need support tailored to the young person's level of risk—based on their trajectory, their background, early development and everything else that affects them. That's what I do in my practice. I work with young people, but I primarily work with parents to help them. Thanks to our tools, we—the experts and criminologists—are able to determine whether the young person is part of the 95% or part of the 5% chronic offenders who require more intensive support.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Riendeau. I have to move on to the next speaker.

Next is Ms. Dhillon for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our dear colleague and David's entire family, including Marie-Soleil, who is not here.

Thank you for sharing your heartbreaking experience not only with us, but with everyone in Canada and Quebec. It's truly something that... I don't know how you've managed to be here. You're really brave. All I can say is thank you, on behalf of all of us.

Mr. Berthold, you talked about David and mentioned that his problems began in high school. From what I understand from your testimony, the purpose of your bill is for people in positions of authority to start slapping these young people on the wrist. I want to understand why you say that's the right way to do things, instead of telling parents that their son has problems. When you're young, you never listen to your parents—or at least almost never.

When people in a position of authority, such as police officers, are faced with a young person who may have smoked a joint or drunk alcohol, that's kind of on the borderline of when intervention is warranted. It doesn't go any further than that. However, at some point, it starts to go further. Your goal—which is at the heart of your bill—is, first and foremost, for people in positions of authority to intervene at school with young people aged 14 to 17. After that age, young people have more freedom; they go to college or they are no longer in school.

Any one of you four can answer my question. Is that really the goal—that is, do you want people in positions of authority to intervene?

**Luc Berthold:** People say “punish”, but I prefer to say “heal”. A slap might just open the door to healing. Beyond drugs, there is mental health behind all of this. Mental health issues are at the root of many substance abuse problems. If we ignore that, blame everything on drugs and don't provide treatment, we'll just label the young person a drug user or a pot smoker, thinking that it will go away.

As Ms. Riendeau said, the earlier we intervene, the sooner we are able to identify the issue. Otherwise, parents are at a loss. Personally, I would have appreciated someone like her telling me exactly what we needed to do when David was 13 years old, as we didn't know what to do.

I think Justine wants to add something.

• (1735)

**Justine Berthold:** I'll speak for my sister and me. When my brother started having problems, I was very young. I was seven years old, and he was 13. During those years, he was not doing well. I remember that my sister and I didn't understand everything because we were too young. My parents could see that my brother needed help, and we told our parents. We saw our parents struggling. We saw that our parents weren't doing well. We wanted to help our father, but there was no help.

At that time, we were telling our parents to stop because it was hurting them. We were asking them what they could possibly do. The only thing they told us was that they didn't know what else to do. That's exactly what we told them: They couldn't do any more. The situation was destroying the family; there was nothing more they could do.

I think the goal is to get that little extra for the parents. It's about getting that little extra from the school staff, who will go talk to the

police, so that it's not the parent who has to call the police for their child. I think that's really what we're trying to do.

**Anju Dhillon:** Ms. Levesque, would you like to add anything?

**Caroline Levesque:** As parents, we tried to keep our son in line, give him small family punishments and all that. At some point, things got out of hand. There was also a time where he started doing well, but he didn't want to get treatment.

After he really went off the rails for the first time, in 2018, he pulled himself out of it on his own. However, since his underlying issues had not been addressed, as soon as he faced a setback, he would fall back into that pattern.

If he had received care at a younger age, if he had been given a slap on the wrist that forced him to seek treatment to heal and receive support, the two subsequent episodes might not have happened, nor would the suicidal episode.

That's also the goal we're striving toward.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dhillon.

Mr. Fortin, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have the floor for two and a half minutes, and I don't intend to ask any questions. I won't repeat myself unnecessarily. I'm offering these two and a half minutes to the witnesses, if they would like to finish their testimony.

Ms. Berthold, I really appreciated the testimony you just gave. As a parent, I have always asked myself the following questions about my children: If I am too strict, will they run away, and if I am not strict enough, will they become delinquents? It's true that we don't know. No one has a crystal ball. I, too, Mr. Berthold, would have liked to have someone like Ms. Riendeau with me.

I offer you the remainder of my speaking time.

**Angy Riendeau:** I don't have a crystal ball, either.

**Luc Berthold:** There is no crystal ball. There are no miracles. What we are proposing is a path forward, and we hope people will follow it. I hope to be able to convince people to follow it going forward.

You know, as life would have it, I drew number 30 for private members' business. You know how it works. I was able to do something. Thanks to that, I had the chance to introduce a bill quickly. That is a message life is sending us.

I would like to tell people who are suffering, people going through these situations, that they're less alone than they think. The only problem is knowing where to call. The only problem is knowing who to turn to, as there are so many resources. In emergency situations, we are often referred to the telephone number of the hospital, the crisis centre or places like that. Beyond that, life goes on. There are parents who are suffering. There are young people, brothers and sisters who are suffering. If anyone is hearing this, I want to tell them that there have been at least two suicides in other families following David's suicide. Those people imitated David. So there are other families suffering, and that's sad.

I would like to remind everyone that there is the 988 helpline. I want to say this because it's important to mention it. If you're feeling down, call at least once. If you're in that kind of a state, call—it doesn't cost anything. It takes two seconds, and then you'll be able to talk to someone.

One thing is certain: You mustn't stop at that call. You have to take it further because that is a crisis. You have to get through the crisis by dialling 988 or 1-866-APPELLE in Quebec. Every province has helpline numbers. Afterwards, you need more support.

Thank you for letting me reiterate the importance of seeking help.

• (1740)

**Caroline Levesque:** I'd like to add one thing. This is his mother speaking. Back when David was doing well, he talked about a joint project he had with Luc—giving talks to help people. I think the bill is somewhat of a continuation of that desire to help others.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lawton and then Mr. Housefather, you will be given two and a half minutes each.

[Translation]

**Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC):** Before I ask my questions, I would like to thank you for your courage. I myself nearly lost my life to suicide 16 years ago. I'm no stranger to the pain associated with mental illness. I've also known people who struggled with addiction. Some overcame these challenges, and others did not. I believe that your work on this bill and your willingness to speak about the tragedy that your family experienced will save lives. So, thank you. Justice and compassion both play a key role in our efforts and work.

I need to ask my questions in English. I just wanted to share this more personal message with you first.

[English]

To whoever of David's family would like to answer, I want to ask about the importance of removing someone from the part of their life that has caused problems. I mean removal not just from the drugs but also from the people, because I know it is often a challenge when people are surrounded by the bad influences that got them into that situation. Someone can have short-term success with treatment and then come right back out and be around the people who were essential to the drug usage.

How does that factor into this?

**Luc Berthold:** Unfortunately, Andrew, I will not be able to answer that question, because if I could have done it, I probably would have.

If you don't mind, I will turn to Angy. If David had been arrested, maybe this is something that I would have done. Removing him from his friends could have caused more problems, so I don't know.

[Translation]

**Angy Riendeau:** I would like to draw a parallel that may strike a chord with you. There are similarities between this situation and the situation of a woman in a domestic violence setting. People say that it can take a woman seven attempts to leave her violent environment. However, each time she leaves that environment, she looks for the tools that will ultimately help her leave it for good.

Mr. Berthold spoke about recovery. I'll talk about recovery because you can't cure a substance abuse problem. Every time a person in a position of authority steps in to help a young person, that young person will gradually be given the tools to move forward, to learn to live with the substance abuse problem and eventually to overcome it.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lawton.

Mr. Housefather, it's over to you.

**Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Luc, Caroline and Justine, our hearts go out to you and to all the members of your family, as well as to everyone who has suffered the same pain. I greatly admire the fact that you have taken a tragedy and that you proposed a bill that can help others. No surprise, I support the bill and the amendments that you'll be moving.

I just have one question. As with all other justice-related bills, it can only work if proper professional training is provided for police officers, judges and everyone else involved.

I think that we all agree that this bill should be passed. That said, once the bill has passed, what type of professional training should judges and police officers receive?

• (1745)

**Luc Berthold:** Good question. I must confess that, even today, I'm closer to tragedy and intervention than to this type of solution.

Ms. Riendeau said this earlier. Assessments and training are needed. In Quebec, I think that judges are trained in domestic violence. That's vital. The same applies to police officers. If you can't understand the problem, you can't solve it. Yes, there will be training programs. Yes, there's education. Yes, there are many things. There are also many things that we haven't talked about here. We don't have the time and we want to focus on one thing.

As I said earlier, this is where society needs to step in. I liked what Mr. Fortin said earlier. We can't look after our infrastructure and concrete without looking after the people who will be using them. I think that this is vital. Yes, we'll need to move in this direction.

We plan to continue raising awareness, because that's the first step. It took me one step to be able to get in somewhere. It takes the passage of the bill to give me the authority to talk to people and educate them. You'll be giving me this tool, and I hope that you'll all use it in your area too.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

We're going to suspend for a moment and then go to clause-by-clause.

Luc, I want to say thank you to you and your family again for sharing David's story. If there's anything else the three of you want to say before we move on, I'm happy to give you the time.

**Luc Berthold:** It's just thank you. Thank you to all my colleagues. It's stressful to do that kind of testimony, and it was stressful to talk about it in the House, but it's worth it, because I think we have already helped a lot of families just by the exchanges we've had with them. This is exactly where we want to go.

[Translation]

I want to thank all my colleagues in the House of Commons. It's difficult to take a personal situation and to talk about it this way. My spouse and I made this decision together early on. We don't do anything without the agreement of all our family members. We decided to do this. It isn't easy, but we're doing it. We're sure that we've already changed some small things. People have contacted us and are telling us about these things. Without necessarily realizing it, we've already helped people, just by talking about this.

Thank you for talking about this. For our part, we'll use this as a tool. I also hope that all my colleagues will use this as a tool in their communities and constituencies to help young people.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the people here, both around the table and behind it, for helping us.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1745)

(Pause)

• (1750)

**The Chair:** I'd like to call this meeting back to order.

We are now going to move to clause-by-clause.

With us for technical questions, if there are any, we will have Charles Bélanger, director and general counsel in the youth criminal justice division of the Department of Justice, and Lise-Anne Wheeler, counsel in the youth criminal justice division. They will be here shortly.

I could read through how we do clause-by-clause, but I'm going to suggest that if members around the table don't know that by now, we have other issues that we need to deal with, so I'm going to move right to clause-by-clause.

(On clause 1)

**The Chair:** We'll start with clause 1.

Mr. Berthold, I know the answer to this, but we need unanimous consent to have you move the amendments.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We have unanimous consent, so I will call clause 1, which takes us to CPC-1.

• (1755)

[Translation]

**Luc Berthold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Following our consultations with Mr. Fraser's office and the Department of Justice's recommendations, we came to the conclusion that, in the case of treatment, we shouldn't focus solely on treating drug addiction, but that we could go further. We should be talking about treating not only people who are already addicted to drugs, but also people who are struggling with problematic drug use. This broadens the scope of the bill. Many of my amendments actually stem from this desire to reach more people.

When we introduce a private member's bill, we try to put in as little as possible to make sure that it will pass. In this case, I was asked whether we could go further. Obviously, I said yes. I'm grateful to the people who made these recommendations.

I move that Bill C-231, in clause 1, be amended by replacing lines 8 to 17 on page 1 with the following, under the heading that would now be "Problematic substance use treatment program":

(1.1) person is alleged to have committed an offence under subsection 4(1) of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* or subsection 8(1) of the *Cannabis Act*, the police officer shall consider whether it would be sufficient to refer the young person, with the young person's consent, to a problematic substance use treatment program.

[English]

**The Chair:** I see no other hands, so shall CPC-1 carry?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Clause 1 as amended agreed to)

(On clause 2)

**The Chair:** I call clause 2, which takes us to CPC-2.

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

**Luc Berthold:** This amendment falls into the same category. It's about a treatment program.

I move that Bill C-231, in clause 2, be amended by replacing lines 18 to 24 on page 1 with the following:

2 Section 10 of the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) An extrajudicial sanction may include requiring a young person to attend a problematic substance use treatment program or any other treatment program.

That's all.

[English]

**The Chair:** Shall CPC-2 carry?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Clause 2 as amended agreed to)

(Clause 3 negated)

**The Chair:** We'll go to new clause 3.1, which is CPC-3.

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

**Luc Berthold:** Indeed, we wanted to amend clause 3. That's why we voted against it.

Instead, I move that Bill C-231 be amended by adding after line 4 on page 2 the following regarding a treatment program:

3.1 The Act is amended by adding the following after section 41:

41.1 If a youth justice court finds a young person guilty of any offence, the court may, before imposing a specific sentence, while taking into account the principles set out in subparagraphs 3(1)(b)(iv) and (v) and the purpose and principles set out in section 38 and with the consent of the Attorney General and the young person, delay sentencing to enable the young person to attend a problematic substance use treatment program or any other treatment program.

[English]

**The Chair:** Shall CPC-3 carry?

(Amendment agreed to)

(On clause 4)

**The Chair:** I will call clause 4. That takes us to CPC-4.

Mr. Lawton.

**Andrew Lawton:** Do we need to carry clause 3.1?

**The Chair:** CPC-3 is clause 3.1.

**Andrew Lawton:** That's understood.

**The Chair:** I went through the same mental exercise just before you did, so don't feel bad.

I'll go to clause 4, which takes us to CPC-4.

Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

**Luc Berthold:** I move that Bill C-231, in clause 4, be first amended by replacing line 13 on page 2 with the following:

gram....

Wait a minute. I have a problem. I'll read it in English.

[English]

**Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC):** Mr. Chair, we've all reviewed this material. Can we just deem that it's been moved, without any explanation, unless the sponsor wishes to put it on the record?

**Luc Berthold:** I agree, but I think there's just a word missing here. It's *gramme*.

[Translation]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin:** It's the end of the word in the previous line.

**Luc Berthold:** Okay. I understand.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Can I just beg your pardon for one moment, please?

**Luc Berthold:** I'm okay.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for the interruption.

Mr. Berthold, you were responding to Mr. Brock's suggestion.

**Luc Berthold:** I totally agree with him. We reviewed all the amendments, and I'm good.

**The Chair:** I'm happy to have all of them deemed moved, but if you want to say anything about any of them in particular, just let me know. Is that okay?

**Luc Berthold:** Okay.

We'll just go through them, and I don't have to read them.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Shall CPC-4 carry?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 4 as amended agreed to)

(On clause 5)

**The Chair:** We'll call clause 5, which takes us to CPC-5.

Shall CPC-5 carry?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 5 as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** New clause 5.1 takes us to CPC-6.

**Larry Brock:** It is deemed moved.

**The Chair:** Shall CPC-6 carry?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I call new clause 5.2, which takes us to CPC-7.

**Larry Brock:** It is deemed moved.

**The Chair:** Shall CPC-7 carry?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

• (1800)

**The Chair:** That takes us to new clause 5.3, which is G-1. I believe Ms. Lattanzio will address it.

**Patricia Lattanzio:** The amendment is that Bill C-231 be amended by adding, after line 8 on page 3, the following:

5.3 This Act, other than section 5.2, comes into force on the 30th day after the day on which it receives royal assent.

That way, the bill provides that the coming into force is 30 days after royal assent.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Is there anybody else? No.

Shall G-1 carry?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the bill as amended carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Well done. Thank you, everybody.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Luc, thank you, and congratulations.

The meeting is adjourned.

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