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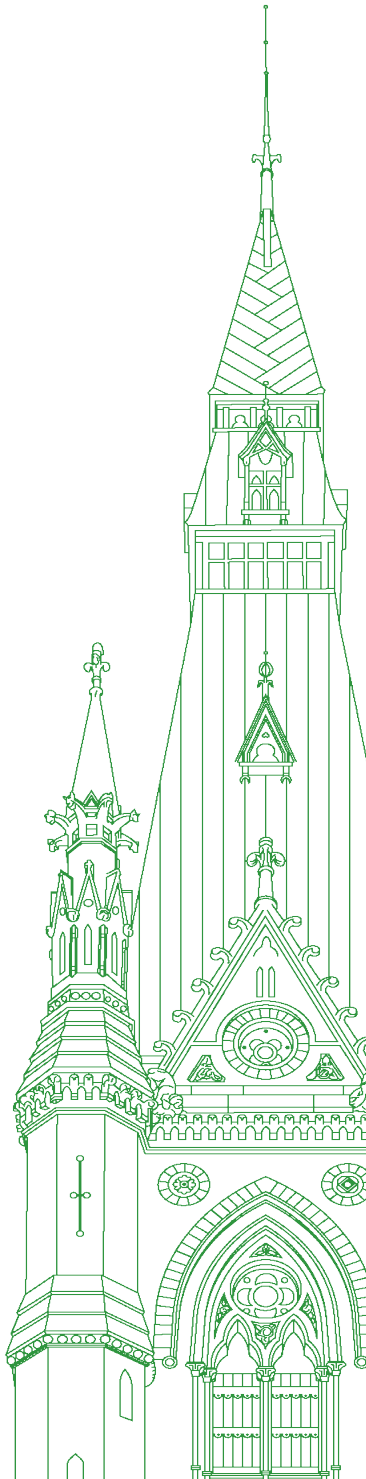

Chair: Jean-Yves Duclos

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Wednesday, November 4, 2026

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for attending meeting number 55 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Before welcoming the witnesses, I would like to invite the committee to consider the proposed budget for this study on conditional release and the relevant federal organizations, which the clerk distributed to members yesterday. As you know, the figures given are estimates. The committee may spend less than anticipated. Any unspent funds will be returned to the Liaison Committee.

Are there any comments or questions regarding the proposed budget?

I see that there are none.

Is the budget approved?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We can now turn to the purpose of today's meeting. In accordance with Standing Order 108(2) and the motion we adopted on Wednesday, October 28, which combined two separate motions, the committee is meeting as part of its study on conditional release and the federal organizations responsible.

For this meeting, we are pleased to welcome some key witnesses: Catherine Latimer, executive director of the John Howard Society of Canada; Emilie Coyle, co-executive director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies; and Marlene Orr, chief executive officer of Native Counselling Services of Alberta, who is joining us via video conference.

Each of these witnesses will have five minutes to speak.

Ms. Latimer, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer (Executive Director, John Howard Society of Canada): Thank you very much.

The John Howard Society is grateful for the invitation to appear on the committee's study of conditional releases.

The John Howard Society is a national charity committed to just, effective and humane responses to the causes and consequences of crime. Our roots are in supporting the reintegration of prisoners back into society. We serve more than 60 communities across Canada, and our local offices run more than 20 halfway houses.

Our hearts go out to those who have been victimized in the past, and we strongly support the provision of services and supports they need to overcome their traumatic experiences. The expanding role of victims in the criminal justice system, however, raises distinct challenges.

Many of the victims' concerns heard by this committee about their rights to participate could be addressed by better administration of the process and clear information about the criminal justice system and their role in it. The Victims Bill of Rights became law in 2015, and since then, there have been a number of additional legislative reforms that are providing additional rights to victims.

Bill S-212 received royal assent in October 2023, and, quite recently, the Victims Bill of Rights was changed in July 2026, providing additional statutory rights. There are many other bills in the queue that will further the rights of victims. Those provisions are yet to be assessed in terms of retraumatizing victims; the unintended negative consequences of sharing information with the wrong victims, such as rival gang members; and how the provisions are being operationalized.

While the ink has yet to dry on the last set of amendments, further changes are being suggested to protect victims, which would clearly result in a reduction in the rights to parole. The evidence is clear that graduated, supported and supervised releases from prison are the safest way to reintegrate prisoners back into communities, thus preventing further victimization.

As the most recent annual report from the correctional investigator stated, victims' rights and the public's safety are best served by CSC meeting its obligations under the CCRA, “particularly its duty to support the rehabilitation and safe reintegration of federally sentenced individuals.”

The pendulum has swung forcefully in the direction of an ever-increasing voice for victims in the criminal justice system. The needed safeguards and guidance to prevent the potential damage to the charter rights of others have not been appropriately implemented.

I have recently written to the chair of the Parole Board and to the Minister of Public Safety to raise concerns about the failure to ensure an impartial and unbiased parole hearing, to protect the privacy rights of the applicant, to ensure victim impact statements were related to the issues required by statute for the Parole Board to consider and to respect the rule of law. From our perspective, a man's parole hearing was turned into political theatre via victim impact statements that lasted for more than two hours and were highly prejudicial and inconsistent with the parole process. We're happy to share those letters with committee if they are of interest.

The legal issue before the Parole Board is and should be the level of risk now posed by the applicant and whether that risk could be adequately managed by the imposition of conditions in the community. A parole hearing is not intended to deny liberties as a way of further punishment of the applicant for the initial crime or to serve another function.

There are, however, significant issues that require study relating to the operation of conditional release, including the failure to ensure that prisoners have completed required programs before their parole eligibility dates, the pressure on prisoners to waive their parole hearings, the growth in much less successful statutory releases rather than releases on parole and successful parole applicants still being in prison because community facilities are full, etc.

The correctional focus on rehabilitation and supported and supervised reintegration is a key to community safety. We are looking forward to the upcoming report to Parliament on the progress being made under the federal framework to reduce recidivism.

In conclusion, we would argue at this point that we would urge the committee not to recommend further legislative amendments, but to ask the Parole Board of Canada and the Minister of Public Safety to improve their administrative practices, information materials and oversight relating to parole hearings to ensure that both victims' rights and the rights of those applying for parole are respected.

Thank you very much.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Latimer.

Ms. Coyle, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Emilie Coyle (Co-Executive Director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies): Chair and members of the committee, thank you very much for the invitation to appear before you today.

As most of you know, for nearly 50 years, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies has worked alongside criminalized women and gender-diverse people in prison and on parole.

Because of where I work, I'm surrounded by women and gender-diverse people who are on conditional release, and their stories resonate through everything that we bring to the table today. When I listen to them, I hear the same story again and again. Their lives are shaped by harm long before they are convicted. They are victims too, but it appears to me that they are not seen. Their lives and experiences are not the ones that are heard.

We tend to speak as if victims and people in prison or on parole are two different groups. For the women who we serve, we often see that victimization and criminalization are the same woman's story.

Here are some statistics.

In a CSC study updating the task force survey 20 years later, 86% of women and gender-diverse people in the federal prisons are survivors of physical abuse, and 68% have been sexually abused. A more recent study by CSC shows that 72% are survivors of intimate partner violence. Indigenous women, now about half of the women in our federal prisons, are the most affected. They are in prison because, for the most part, they were surviving.

These numbers and statistics I've shared with you have hundreds of individual stories captured within them. They are stories that would take more time than we are allotted here to tell, and they are voices you are not likely to hear, because they are keeping their heads down. They're trying to live good lives and are fearful of the retribution that would come from speaking their stories while on parole.

Now let me give you an example of how the law currently works. Let's say a woman is convicted of an offence against the man who hurt her. He then could become her registered victim. He could learn her release date, destination and conditions and see her photograph. Under CSC practice, as a registered victim, he's told the dates and destination of every trip she takes outside of her geographical boundaries, including to see her own family. Every new measure that sets victims against people on conditional release is written as if this woman and many others with the same story do not exist and their experiences do not matter.

Even with this in mind, we do not recommend legislative reform as a remedy.

We come to this work as an organization that is constantly examining our laws and how they are carried out to ensure public safety. We care very deeply about the people who have been harmed. It is at the core of what we do, and they are the people we see every day. When we say that legislative reform to conditional release is not needed at this time, there is a good reason.

We emphasize, importantly, that across a number of contexts related to conditional release specifically—as you heard from Ms. Latimer—there is a need for dedicated attention to the existing practices, but we offer that overall, the deficiencies are not in the law; they're in the operationalization of the law.

We also understand that the federal ombudsperson for victims of crime will be commencing an investigation on this topic and caution that the report from this study should ensure that the recommendations wait on its findings.

We talk as if parole is easily attained. It is not. The latest data shows that the Parole Board grants full parole in fewer than a third of its decisions for women. That is juxtaposed against another illuminating statistic, which is that 94% of women do not return to federal custody within five years.

When we hear about terrible cases, horrific cases that hurt us, we cannot let that be evidence that the law needs amendment. The deficiencies are not in the law; they are in how it is carried out. This calls for oversight, not new barriers, because every time we put new barriers in place, we're going to make it harder for everyone, and women already wait too long for parole.

Did you know that only one out of five indigenous women is released when first eligible? That's only one in five.

Every proposal to delay parole pulls against commitments this government has already made, including the federal framework to reduce recidivism, which was a Conservative member's bill supported by all parties. It names five pillars for successful and safe reintegration. You also have two justice strategies, the indigenous and the Black justice strategies, that you can call upon.

The Supreme Court stated in R v. Bissonnette that a sentence with no realistic possibility of parole is “incompatible with human dignity.”

On the subject of human dignity, victims of crime deserve our full support, and that support does not require the loss of reintegration through conditional release for other people who are already victims.

● (1640)

We have submitted a lengthier brief with five recommendations contained within it. I can speak to that later.

Most importantly, I ask this earnestly—and I feel I do this every time I come to committee: How will this study guarantee that the most vulnerable and marginalized people we work with in our prisons, and who are so consistently overlooked, are given consideration?

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Orr, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Marlene Orr (Chief Executive Officer, Native Counselling Services of Alberta): Good afternoon. I'm grateful for the opportunity to appear before this committee.

Native Counselling Services of Alberta has, for 50 years, worked in justice, in both the courts and federal corrections. We run two section 81 healing lodges for women and men who are federally incarcerated.

There is very little opportunity for victims to heal within federal corrections. They register as victims and are notified of every movement of the offender, without context. However, every time they're notified, their trauma is triggered. They may not know what the offender is doing to change their life that would involve absences. They just know they are moving in the system.

There is a restorative justice program within corrections, but it is very small and extremely limited. I believe there is one person for the entire country. In the healing lodges, we help offenders heal from the historical trauma impacts that led to criminal activity and are the basis for criminal activity. Victims rarely get support to heal from their trauma.

In parole hearings, victims are allowed the opportunity to share their victim impact statements, as they should. However, vetting of those statements is limited, and often, indigenous offenders are faced with racist remarks contained in those statements. No one in Canada should face racist remarks, including offenders, even from victims.

Our people have been victimized, and there is often a victim-offender overlap. However, we cannot continue to treat people as victims. We have to help them heal. Continuously keeping people in the space of victims allows them to internalize that and limits their growth and healing. Legislative change around this may not be necessary; looking at what is happening within corrections to address victims and their healing and offering more opportunities for restorative justice are what's really needed.

People serving life sentences or extensive sentences need a slow, gradual release. That includes lots of opportunities to be on escorted temporary absences before they're allowed to go out on their own. We don't have to look at legislative changes. For people serving life sentences who are out in the community, there is enough technology available to monitor them until they gain the trust of their parole officer.

I don't speak from an academic perspective. I speak about what I know, having worked with indigenous people in federal corrections for several decades. We need to look at what's available to monitor people in the community—ankle monitoring for certain offenders, or apps to monitor movement, like Life360. There are all sorts of technologies available to reduce risk in the community. We need to take advantage of them.

We also need to better serve victims so they can heal and so that offenders can also heal in a restorative practice.

Thank you again.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

This brings us to the question period for members of Parliament.

Mr. Caputo, you have the floor for six minutes.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing.

Ms. Orr, I appreciate what you have to say. I have 29 first nations in my riding. I was a parole officer as well, in my early twenties. That's where I was actually introduced to what happened at residential schools.

I've dealt with many people. In my later career as a prosecutor, I prosecuted many people who had gone to residential school as well. I'm very well aware of this issue. I'm saying that I'm not coming at it blindly.

Ms. Latimer and Ms. Coyle, I listened intently to your opening comments. Do I have it right that you would agree that people should generally, in your mind's eye, be released on parole earlier than they are now?

Catherine Latimer: I would say that people are not getting the necessary programs, as part of their correctional plans, to prepare them for parole. The issue of whether they should be released depends on the level of risk they pose to the community and whether or not there are conditions.

Having good rehabilitative programs and having access to them in a timely manner would allow people to be out earlier, as the Auditor General has recommended.

● (1650)

Frank Caputo: Ms. Coyle, go ahead.

Emilie Coyle: As Ms. Latimer said, I would suggest that it is on a case-by-case basis. Our law looks at context. The Parole Board looks at context. Certainly that's what they do now.

We would welcome more oversight and more interest, actually, in seeing how they do the work they do and in bringing their decisions to light.

Frank Caputo: Ms. Latimer, you said that “the pendulum has swung”. Could you please reread your quote from your opening comments?

Catherine Latimer: I said, “The pendulum has swung forcefully in the direction of an ever-increasing voice for victims in the criminal justice system.”

Frank Caputo: I'm not sure how often you deal with victims. I deal with victims a lot. I'm not sure that any victim I've dealt with, with all due respect to you, would say that the pendulum has swung to victims.

I have been to parole hearing after parole hearing. I have had people weeping on the telephone about their secondary victimization at the hands of the system. These are people whose daughter's murderer walks into the parole hearing, and they don't know whether the CSC is recommending release. People don't necessarily even know that this is coming or if an in-office review is coming. The offender gets to choose whether they get an in-office review. The victim doesn't get that choice, yet here we are.

I'm sorry; I just can't agree, because—

Catherine Latimer: I accept your position that you don't agree, but victim impact statements have now been introduced in the paroling process and in the correctional process—

Frank Caputo: As they should be.

Catherine Latimer: That is right, but they don't have the information or the perspective that would allow them to be as objective and impartial as you would want any kind of judicial body that's looking at people's rights to be.

Frank Caputo: Hold on just a minute there. Let's stop there, please.

Are you suggesting that a parole board member cannot, as an independent member, disabuse themselves of what they read? Their job is to be independent, and what you're saying is that if they hear from a victim, which didn't factor into your equation of risk in the community, they might be prejudiced.

Catherine Latimer: I encourage you to read the letter that we wrote to Madame Blanchard in relation to the hearing that was very much orchestrated. It had two hours of victim impact statements at the beginning, which largely went to the initial offence, rather than to the issue of risk. Their political agenda—

Frank Caputo: I'm sorry. I just.... We have a minute and a half here.

You're saying that a victim who talks about the offence—a victim who could potentially be living a psychological life sentence—should not be permitted to talk about the very thing that put them in that psychological prison, because it doesn't deal with risk. Do I understand your position correctly?

Catherine Latimer: The issue that is before the Parole Board is the level of risk the individual presents—

Frank Caputo: I'm well aware of that.

Catherine Latimer: I think there is an important role for victims at the parole hearing, particularly if there is an ongoing relationship and ongoing threats are coming from the perpetrator to the victim, and if they want certain conditions applied, such as a geographical restriction or a non-contact order restriction imposed on the—

Frank Caputo: With all due respect, you're saying that what a victim thinks and what a victim feels should be factored in only when there could be a risk to them in the future. The fact that this young child was offended against and they relive that every night with PTSD doesn't go to risk; it goes to their perception and their feelings. From what you're saying, the fact that this person might live in Newfoundland now and the victim might live in British Columbia shouldn't matter, because it doesn't have anything to do with risk.

● (1655)

Catherine Latimer: It matters enormously.

My opening comment was that we very much support the services, help, guidance and whatever to deal with the trauma. I'm not denying that there's a considerable amount of trauma associated with being a victim of crime, but whether that goes to trying to increase the penalty or delaying a release if the person is otherwise going to be safe in the community with the conditions imposed is an entirely different matter. That's not what the Parole Board is seized with looking at.

Frank Caputo: It should be seized with looking at something different.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Latimer. Thank you, Mr. Caputo.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Acan, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Coyle and Ms. Latimer, thank you for joining us today.

As both of you have stated that the system can improve by addressing deficiencies within operationalization rather than gaps in the law itself, it may be helpful to also ask you to tell us what administrative changes to existing processes you would recommend to improve the parole processes for victims, while also respecting offenders' rights.

Also, what would you recommend to improve public safety and help prevent future victimization?

Emilie Coyle: Our first recommendation in our brief, which you will receive once it has been translated, is that there be no change to the CCRA's conditional release provisions or to parole eligibility, because we think victims' concerns about notice, scheduling and communication addressed by the board and the CSC can happen within their existing authorities. That needs to be enhanced, as well as publicly reported evaluation and measurement of how the board and the CSC carry out conditional release.

Also, we're very interested to see how the federal ombudsperson for victims of crime's pending investigation recommends changes, because we think that will be a really important study.

Sima Acan: Thank you.

Ms. Latimer, do you want to add anything to that?

Catherine Latimer: No. I would agree with that.

To go back to Mr. Caputo's point, I think there are lots of operational improvements that could be made in terms of some clearer understanding of what the role of the victim is, particularly in the correctional elements of the criminal justice system, and where their input could guide the decision that's being made by the Parole Board.

I think if you mislead prisoners or people—victims—into thinking they're going to have weight on the ultimate decision of release, it's only one factor among many, and it has little to do with how hurt they have become because of the offence that was committed. That hurt needs to be addressed in a constructive way, whether it's through restorative practices, counselling or whatever helps overcome that trauma.

Sima Acan: Thank you very much.

Madam Orr, thank you so much for also joining us today.

I would like to ask you the same question. Additionally, could you also speak to the work that your organization has undertaken to help individuals successfully reintegrate into their communities following release, including parole?

Marlene Orr: I think the role of victims in parole hearings is not clearly understood within the system. Victim impact statements are to be considered, but what is “to be considered”, and how? I think that needs some clarity.

Native Counselling Services of Alberta, under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, runs two healing lodges in Edmonton, Alberta, one for 73 indigenous men and one for 28 indigenous women. This is work we've been doing for almost 50 years, prior to the CCRA allowing for section 81 lodges.

The work that we do is getting to the root cause of criminal behaviour, which is usually tied to historic trauma impacts, and understanding what our people need to do to heal, to be able to move on and be a part of society. Generally, addictions are involved, and we view addictions as a form of pain management.

Having these experiences doesn't make it okay for the behaviour that's happened or the harm it's caused. When it comes to victims, we have a program that's about understanding victims' perspectives. We also offer a number of ways for people to make amends to their victims, whether their victims participate or not. We have cultural ceremonial practices that are about seeking forgiveness from the victims. The victims may or may not take part in that. We have people give back to the community. They've taken from the community, and they need to give back.

We also work with people to understand that their victims are still feeling pain on an ongoing basis. It is growing their compassion towards their victims while they're working on healing from their own victimization.

When we talk about victims in parole hearings, I think their role is not clearly defined. Those impact statements aren't defined. There is a grey area that's left open to interpretation by Parole Board members about what it means to take into consideration the impact statements. We can't lose sight of victims, but we need to figure out better ways to help them heal, either in a restorative practice or outside of it.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Acan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Firstly, I would like to thank the witnesses who are with us today to discuss this important issue.

Ms. Latimer, I would like you to tell me about the role that parole plays in the rehabilitation of a prisoner. Someone commits a crime and is convicted following a trial. They are imprisoned for a certain period and are allowed to apply for parole after a specified period. Is this important?

What role does parole play in the rehabilitation of the prisoner?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: Parole is an essential step in promoting the safe return of prisoners to the communities. We're hoping rehabilitative programming is made available to them in the correctional regime and that it includes opportunities to engage slowly with the community.

As Marlene mentioned, escorted temporary absences are key. They start to learn how better to adapt to situations in the community. Parole is that graduated, supervised and supported mechanism by which people return to the community, and it is extremely effective in terms of reducing reoffending. It is the most effective.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: To your knowledge, are there any statistics available to assess the difference between those who are granted parole and those who are not, and to measure the effect of parole on rehabilitation? Do we have any figures on this?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: The figures we have are coming from the Parole Board of Canada's performance monitoring. They indicate that people who are released on day parole have a successful completion of 91%. Revocation for a breach of condition is 8.2%, and revocation for a reoffence is 0.8%. Revocation for a violent offence is 0.1%. If people are coming in on day parole, they're likely to be successful 81% of the time. On full parole, the success rate is 85.6%.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Excuse me, I don't mean to be rude, but we don't have much time and I just want to make sure I hear the other side of the story.

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: Statutory release is a non-parole decision release that happens by statute after two-thirds of the sentence, and they're successful only 60% of the time.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: So, parole does seem to be useful. Would it be possible for you to send us those figures?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: Absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: The information I have indicates that, at present, a very high percentage of prisoners are not there following a conviction, but are instead awaiting trial. Do you have any figures on that as well?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: These would be prisoners who are largely in the provincial jails on remand. Yes, those numbers are extremely high, and they vary from province to province, but as many as 80% of prisoners in provincial custody are awaiting trials.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Do you have any documents or statistics?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: I have those statistics, and I'd be more than pleased to send them to you.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

I don't recall the exact words, but you said earlier that the programs were not sufficient, or that programs effective enough for the rehabilitation of prisoners had not been put in place. I'd like to hear more about that.

What should or could be done better in federal prisons or provincial prisons to rehabilitate these people?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: I think there are a number of things. I mean, the big problem is that there are wait-lists and backlogs to get required programs for prisoners in the prison system. I don't know if it's the same for women, but that's certainly the situation for men. They're not getting the types of programming that they need to be able to be successful.

I think a very important opportunity to overcome that situation is to have more community engagement in the prisons from organizations such as Elizabeth Fry, John Howard, St. Leonard's and The Salvation Army, along with many others that would be quite willing and interested in having greater inreach and in providing effective bridges back into the community and delivering the programs that are needed.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Do you have any figures showing that people who use the services of the John Howard Society of Canada or the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies in Quebec have a higher rehabilitation rate than those who do not use them?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: We can do a comparison between prisoners who are released into federal CCCs, which are their community halfway houses, and those who are released into halfway houses that are run by organizations such as the John Howard Society, and you'll see much more significant positive success rates from that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Lloyd, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Thank you, and thank you to the witnesses.

I just want to clarify a remark that I believe you made, Ms. Latimer, which was that the success rate for people who are granted parole is higher than the success rate for those who are given statutory release. Is that what you said?

Catherine Latimer: That's true.

Dane Lloyd: Am I right in saying that I heard earlier that you believe that—obviously I'm not trying to put words in your mouth—people are not getting parole who should be getting parole?

Catherine Latimer: Yes.

Dane Lloyd: Okay.

Do you think one of the reasons the success of people who are given parole is so much higher than the success of people released statutorily is perhaps that the Parole Board is doing its job in ensuring that people who are not a risk to the community are getting parole, while those who are a risk are being rejected for parole?

Catherine Latimer: No, I do not accept that.

Dane Lloyd: Why is that?

Catherine Latimer: First of all, generally people getting out on parole tend now to be people who do not have set sentences. We're talking about life sentences or indeterminate sentences. They can only get out through the Parole Board. Most of the others, who have relatively short sentences, are not getting the programs, so they are not being adequately prepared to even appear before the Parole Board for the board to make a decision on their level of safety.

There's a very significant problem in terms of people being asked to waive their parole hearings because they have not had the required programs and therefore will not be supported by CSC. There's a very high concurrence and concordance rate for the people CSC is supporting—

Dane Lloyd: We could get into a longer philosophical debate, but I'd be pleased if you could provide this committee with a written response for why you believe this to be the case.

Catherine Latimer: Sure.

● (1710)

Dane Lloyd: I might not agree with you on that, but I certainly sympathize with your argument that prisoners are not getting the programs they need in order to be successful.

I want to bring up my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac. Scott Reid has been quite a champion of this. He's talked about the CORCAN program. It costs about $66 million annually. However, he's listed some of the employment skills being given to prisoners, such as shovelling manure, apple picking and sewing pillowcases.

Do you believe the CORCAN program is equipping offenders with the skills they need to succeed in the modern-day job market?

Catherine Latimer: I believe it's equipping them with soft skills: being responsible for doing a job and doing it well, getting up early, doing whatever is required of them and completing those activities.

Insofar as they're being equipped to find jobs in the market, whether they're getting marketable skills has been a long-standing issue. There's a real opportunity for that now, particularly with Canada's emphasis on building.

Certainly, most of the prisoners I know are excellent workers. The problem is not with working. Many of them are very proud of the skill sets they have, whether it's welding, roofing or whatever they—

Dane Lloyd: I appreciate that. I'm sorry to cut you off, but I have only limited time.

Catherine Latimer: That's all right.

Dane Lloyd: There was recently a cut of 25 community employment coordinators, for about $2.7 million in savings. That seems like a program that could have really helped prisoners to get jobs in the community.

Do you support those cuts that the Liberal government made?

Catherine Latimer: No, I do not support those cuts, for exactly the reason you're indicating. Employment is a very important safeguard against reoffending.

Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

I'm also concerned about these certificates. Between 2020 and 2023, there were about 112,000 skill certificates released by the government. Only 64 of those were for a provincially approved Red Seal apprenticeship program. The majority of them were for WHMIS training, which is a one-day course.

Are these certificates helping the vast majority of offenders?

Catherine Latimer: I think there could be great improvements in terms of advancing skills that would lead to employment prospects, whether that's work release or afterward.

Dane Lloyd: In my final 30 seconds, I want to talk about the cuts to the fetal alcohol syndrome pilot. It hasn't been funded since 2020. The last assessment was in December 2024.

What impact has that had on prisoners? What could the positive impact be, going forward, if it were looked at again?

Catherine Latimer: I'm sorry. I'm unaware of that program or study.

Certainly, people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder require special care in the prison system and beyond. They're vulnerable to a lot of things in the prison system.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

Ms. Dandurand, you have the floor for five minutes.

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today and for shedding further light on the situation.

Ms. Latimer, I would like to follow up on the questions raised by my colleague, Mr. Fortin, regarding the statistics on the outcomes of conditional release, in particular. I think you have made it quite clear that the success rate for conditional release is very high and that reoffending rates are much higher when conditional release is not granted.

Is there a distinction between individuals who are granted conditional release and those who are not? Do those who are not released pose a greater risk? If so, would things improve if we could arrange for them to be granted conditional release?

What is your view on this?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: One of the areas where we're very keen on the federal framework to reduce recidivism is to actually have more granular data about who is not succeeding in the criminal justice system. Where do we need to tailor our efforts and how do we need to support those people who are more at risk of failure?

Certainly, those people who are coming out at statutory release are coming out without support. They will be coming out with conditions. They may be coming out with a residency requirement that requires them to live somewhere in particular, and it may be a halfway house, but that requirement has not built the kind of relationship and continuity that somebody coming out on parole would have. I think there's lots that can be done.

This is most important for people who are coming out at warrant expiry, which means their sentence is at an end. They've been identified as being at the highest risk to reoffend and they're released without any support or supervision. That's an area where I think we should be marshalling our efforts to really volunteer and make sure there are connections with community groups for those people who are coming out at warrant expiry. It is a relatively small proportion, but it's the most dangerous group, for sure.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

Marianne Dandurand: You have raised a very interesting point for us to consider. Thank you for that.

Ms. Orr, you have heard the evidence given by my colleague, Mr. Caputo. You have also worked as a probation officer. I would like to give you the opportunity to respond to his comments.

What is your view on my colleague's comments?

[*English*]

Marlene Orr: Is there anything in particular about his statement that you want me to speak to?

Marianne Dandurand: Generally speaking, he was talking a lot about the victims' rights. As a parole officer, what is your perspective on what he said?

Marlene Orr: There's a real disconnect in the system for victims and the support of victims, for sure. That's why our agency focuses on helping offenders to understand and have compassion for their victims. Without holding up a mirror to what has happened and the impact they've had, they don't know.

I think there is a lot of triggering of their trauma in the system. I believe that attendance at parole hearings creates risk. It creates risk for offenders. It creates risk for victims. I'm not just talking about risk of a crime happening; I'm talking about emotional and mental risk.

I'm not sure what the benefit is of having them there. I believe they have a right to express how they continue to live with the harm; I just don't believe there's enough done in the system to support them and help them heal.

We spend a lot of time and effort with offenders, helping them to address their own trauma and their own issues, because those offenders who come out later in their sentence or come out from a higher security level are living in the trauma they experience in jail and behave from that. We don't offer the same to victims. It's a lost opportunity for real change in the system.

[*Translation*]

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you very much. That is a very interesting account. I noticed my colleague nodding in agreement too. Thank you.

You also mentioned the new technologies that enable surveillance. I think this is something we need to look into. I come from a rural area, and there is a centre for women who are victims of domestic violence located in a place where there is no mobile phone coverage. A criminal could still make their way to that centre, despite the technological measures in place. I imagine you face the same sort of challenge. I just wanted to say that this is another technology-related challenge we need to look into.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dandurand.

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Orr and Ms. Coyle, please do not think that your testimonies are unimportant, but as I had begun discussing this with Ms. Latimer and I am short of time, I shall take the liberty of continuing with her, if you have no objection.

Ms. Latimer, I would like to hear your comments on another aspect of parole, which is considered beneficial to rehabilitation. We all agree that, as a society, we wish to rehabilitate everyone. We realize that this is not possible, but, in an ideal world, if we could rehabilitate everyone after they had served their time in prison, society would be all the better for it.

When there is an application for parole, the victims of the original offence are offered the opportunity to give evidence. We have heard testimony stating that this process was traumatic for the victims. I would like to hear your comments on this.

Firstly, is it necessary or useful to have victims testify in the context of a parole application? If so, how could the trauma be mitigated or, ideally, eliminated?

● (1720)

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: That's a very good question.

I think there is an important function that parole boards can serve in terms of addressing the concerns of victims, and that includes if the victim is continuing to directly fear that particular prisoner. There are some people who have committed offences who are very focused and targeted on one person or one set of situations, and they can come back to that and mean harm to the people.

If that's going to be the case, they probably wouldn't be released anyway if that was on their agenda, but if the victim perceives that this could be a problem for them, if they've received some implication of a threat to their well-being, then I think it's very important that an opportunity be given to impose a condition on the release that would keep that person away from the victim.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Couldn't a simple letter or written document from the victim suffice and minimize the trauma?

[*English*]

Catherine Latimer: It would be enough, and it would, in my view, lessen the trauma for the victim in having to appear time and time again.

I think that people could have clearer expectations of what the Parole Board could do for the victim. If they think their wish that the person should never get out would influence a parole decision, it shouldn't, because the parole decision is trying to promote rehabilitation and reintegration and safeguard the safety of the community, not repunish the person or continue the punishment.

I think it's ensuring that people understand what they can get out of a parole hearing, so yes, a simple letter would suffice if they understood what the range of options or outcomes would be.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Ms. Kirkland, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start by saying that my background is in educational therapy. I've worked with a lot of young people and adults with a lot of vulnerabilities and I believe very strongly in the principles of redemption and rehabilitation. I think that a lot of the time, that can happen. I also believe that there are times that it can't and has been proven that it's not working.

I do have to ask a few questions.

Madam Latimer, to go back to the pendulum switching to an ever-increasing voice for victims, are you saying that you feel as though victims' rights and offenders' rights are balanced at this time?

Catherine Latimer: I believe that victims' rights and offenders' rights are entirely different.

When the state has its most coercive powers directed at an individual, then they have greatly enhanced charter rights to protect themselves from abuse. There are deeply enshrined charter rights that are available to people who are in conflict with the law. Victims' rights are based in statute—they're statutory rights—so they're different.

Rhonda Kirkland: Do you think victims should have more rights than they currently have, or do you think the pendulum has swung enough that they have all the rights they need?

Catherine Latimer: My own view is that expectations were raised beyond what the criminal justice system can do for victims through the Victims Bill of Rights, and continue to be, and that often victims are used as opportunities to seek tougher approaches to criminal justice because the penalties they perceive are not adequate to address the harm they experienced.

Rhonda Kirkland: I understand that offenders who have been convicted of violent crimes have rights, and there are some charter rights there. You mentioned access; they're not getting access to good programs, with the wait-lists and backlogs.

I know they have been given access to many services and resources, including substance abuse treatment, anger and violence management, sex offender treatment, cognitive behavioural therapy, education and literacy programs, employment skills training, psychiatric care and counselling, addiction treatment risk and needs assessments, housing and employment assistance, and life skills and parenting programs. Of course, taxpayers are paying for all of that.

Can you list any of those services that I listed that are provided to victims of violent crimes as well?

● (1725)

Catherine Latimer: Victims of violent crime have access to the victims compensation fund to help redress some of the harms that they've experienced. They are entitled to restitution. They certainly have a green light in the civil courts to sue for damages as a result of the harm that they experienced from perpetrators.

I think they do have a lot, and there are a lot of victim services as well.

Rhonda Kirkland: I would argue that it's not a right. That's compensation, which I know from my work with victims they often do not get access to. They can ask for it, but they don't get it.

Ms. Coyle, I appreciate the work. You talked about women, and I want to ask you this: Are you aware that offenders use parole hearings for the sole purpose of revictimizing women, specifically those who are victims of intimate partner violence?

Emilie Coyle: Yes, we are aware of that complexity in the system.

When a woman has been federally sentenced, it's different from the provincial system. There are parole and probation, which are two very different systems. When a woman who has been federally sentenced is on parole, yes, her abuser can use her parole hearing to harm her.

Rhonda Kirkland: It happens quite a lot, from what I understand.

On another brief note, an offender released recently in Oshawa had been convicted of murdering a 14-year-old boy. He was granted three unescorted temporary absences, despite documented concerns about his violent history. These are documented concerns within corrections. What evidence do you think the Parole Board should require to demonstrate that someone with those risk factors can safely enter the community?

My concern is this. I know your organization has advocated independent oversight and accountability within the federal corrections system. Should the Parole Board face comparable scrutiny when approving the release of offenders with unresolved risk factors?

Emilie Coyle: I've assisted many a parole hearing because of the work that we do with federally sentenced women. The challenge, of course, is that what you see on paper is often not the reality of the person in front of you.

I've supported women. I know what their experiences are, and often what you see on the paperwork that is presented to the Parole Board is not actually the human being. For example, to go back to Marlene's point, I worked with a Black woman who had a number of very racist points in her paperwork that was presented to the Parole Board. I had to intervene in advance and say that if you put any weight on this document, you're going to be complicit in the racism of the system. It's important that—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt.

Rhonda Kirkland: I think my time is done. I just want to thank Ms. Orr for the work that she does. I know I didn't get a chance to ask her a question, but I just want to thank her.

The Chair: That is well understood and much appreciated.

Thank you, Madam Coyle.

Let me turn to MP Housefather for five minutes, please.

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

I am going to start with follow-up questions to Ms. Latimer and Ms. Orr, based on things that others have asked, and then I have a couple of questions of my own.

Ms. Latimer, you've been very clear, and I think your testimony is very well spoken, but there was one thing that I couldn't really understand. You were talking about an ongoing threat posed by the perpetrator to the victim, meaning it was not just the victim's own subjective fear; you were talking about ongoing threats being made by a convicted perpetrator toward the victim. You were talking about safeguards that could then be used in the event of this person being paroled.

Why would anyone deserve parole if they continue to threaten their victim?

Catherine Latimer: You're quite right. If there was an actual threat, then the risk assessment would be sufficiently high that the person would probably never be released on parole. The problem occurs when there's a subjective threat or when there had been threats in the past, but the person has changed their behaviour to such an extent that it is no longer a risk factor. The victim might legitimately still be concerned and not want that person anywhere near them.

● (1730)

Anthony Housefather: Yes, and that's understood. I wanted to get that out, because I don't think it was exactly clear before.

Ms. Orr, thank you very much.

Madame Dandurand and I were both struck by something you said. From your experience, could you talk to me about how, within the system, we can provide additional services to victims that would be more parallel?

I agree with what Ms. Latimer said: Offenders are one category and victims are a separate category. They require separate things, although they merge sometimes.

Based on your experience, what would you say the state should be providing that it's not currently providing to victims?

Marlene Orr: It's the opportunity to heal.

When we look at victim services, they're usually there to support people through the court process. That support could be rides or it could be offering referrals, but there isn't any meaningful opportunity to heal during that process.

Once they register with federal corrections as victims, there's a very small, one-person program that allows for restorative justice practices. Other than that, what they receive is notification of movement, without context. The trauma that they carry from being victimized is triggered with every notice of movement.

If someone is in the community on an escorted or unescorted temporary absence and they're seeing a psychologist, a counsellor or an elder, the victim has no context. All they know is that this person is out in the community *x* number of times. I believe that every time they receive a notification, their trauma is triggered.

I think there's a lot of room within the system for restorative practice, but in or out of the system, the opportunity for healing should be made available—

Anthony Housefather: I'm sorry. I have only limited time. Can I ask another follow-up question?

A few years ago, probably seven or eight years ago now, I was the chairman of the justice committee when we did a study on jurors. We found that there was a complete lack of support for people who had served on a jury following a very traumatic trial. There were no mental health supports, for example. One of the things we recommended, which provinces have started to implement—pretty much most provinces have now implemented it—is mental health support for people who suffered trauma after having served on a jury.

Do you think there should be some type of national mental health support program for victims that would allow any victim to call 24-7 and have a counsellor assigned?

Marlene Orr: Absolutely. Again, I think there's a missed opportunity when we look at the situations victims are constantly placed in.

In the healing that is done and the movement that's done by offenders, there are supports generally through programming within the system, but they don't exist for victims. We're going to constantly be in situations of victims carrying fear and trauma unless support is given to them.

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: Unfortunately, you do not.

Anthony Housefather: Okay. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you for asking, MP Housefather, with your usual kindness.

That brings us to thanking you, dear witnesses, both in person and virtually, for all of your time and the quality of the input you invested in this. Thank you again so much, on behalf of everyone. Have a great day.

We'll now suspend for a few minutes to welcome the other witnesses.

● (1730)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1735)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are resuming the hearing. Thank you for returning.

We begin this second hour with three further witnesses, whom I would like to welcome.

Firstly, we welcome Melissa Munn, professor, who will be giving evidence in a personal capacity.

Next, we have Rosemary Ricciardelli, full professor and holder of the research chair in safety, security and wellness. She will also be giving evidence in a personal capacity.

I would like to thank them for coming.

Finally, we have Omar Yaqub, servant of servants, Islamic Family and Social Services Association. He is joining us via video conference.

Each of these individuals will have five minutes to speak.

Ms. Munn, you have the floor for five minutes.

● (1740)

[*English*]

Melissa Munn (Professor, As an Individual): Thank you for your invitation to speak with you about public safety and share some insights from my nearly four decades of working in the field.

I've been a frontline worker with victims of gender-based violence and have worked extensively with federally sentenced individuals, particularly those serving life sentences. I believe this experience, along with my research on successful release and reintegration, has given me a unique vantage point from which to consider what actually contributes to public safety and what we might be doing differently.

When people ask me what I would do to prevent crime and make our communities safer, my answer is remarkably consistent: I would expand the parole system.

Conditional release is not simply a benefit for people leaving prison; it's an essential component of public safety. In fact, I would argue that Canada's parole system, in its current form, is one of the most successful and perhaps most misunderstood and underappreciated public safety initiatives that we have.

I recognize that this is not necessarily a headline-grabbing position, nor is it always an easy message to sell to the public. The idea of releasing people from prison, particularly those who have committed serious offences, can generate considerable anxiety, but when we look beyond the rhetoric and examine the evidence, the government's own data tells a compelling story.

When you have a reoffence rate of 1% or less for parolees and 0.2% for violent reoffending, the system is working. If we could find a way to incorporate data on life-sentenced individuals into the completion statistics, our success rates would be even more impressive, as life-sentenced individuals rarely reoffend. I remember one parole officer in Ontario telling me she wished she could have an all-lifer caseload so she'd have the easiest job in the office.

I appreciate that statistics alone may not change someone's mind about the merits of releasing people from prison. Numbers can tell us what is happening, but they don't always help us understand why it matters.

I'd like to ask you to participate in a brief thought exercise with me. I want you each to take a moment and think about the person who has had the most profound, positive influence on your life. Picture that person. Think about what they contributed to your life and why their influence was so meaningful. Now consider this question. What was that person's primary role in your life? Was it to punish you or was it to support you? I won't ask you to answer.

Over the years, I have posed this question to thousands of students, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Almost everyone chooses someone who supported them and helped them become better versions of themselves. I think most of us understand that instinctively.

I have met families of murder victims who know support, encouragement and meaningful relationships are powerful forces for change, and I have met victims who believe people and society thrive when we invest, rather than ruminate on failure. Unfortunately, their voices often get drowned out by those who believe punishment will help them process their grief.

This brings me back to parole. At its best, parole offers precisely that opportunity. It is the hope of being supported to become better, make different choices, take responsibility and, ultimately, contribute positively to society.

Parole is not extended automatically or indiscriminately. It is reserved for individuals whose risks can be appropriately managed in the community and who demonstrate, through a rigorous assessment process, that they can be safely supervised out of prison. The evidence shows that the case management teams, psychologists, parole officers and Parole Board members are doing an excellent job of assessing whether or not an individual's release is appropriate.

It is the possibility of parole and the hope that one day they may return to their communities that motivate many people in prison to use their time constructively. This is why I become increasingly concerned when I see a growing number of bills before the House aimed at restricting parole or decreasing eligibility.

We all know that the most dangerous person in any room is the one with nothing left to lose. I worry that legislative approaches that diminish the possibility of parole also diminish one of the most important incentives for people to engage constructively while incarcerated.

I think particularly of my mother-in-law, who spent 23 years working as a nurse in a men's prison. I cannot help but wonder whether the people doing this important work will be less safe in an environment where hope for release is increasingly out of reach. Correctional staff are members of our communities, and their safety should matter too. Policy that impacts our community should not be based on unevidenced, fear-based ideas.

● (1745)

To conclude, I argue that parole is not about choosing the interests of people who have committed crimes over the interests of the victim or the public; it's about recognizing that helping people successfully reintegrate into communities is itself a critical public safety strategy.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Munn.

Ms. Ricciardelli, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Rosemary Ricciardelli (Full Professor, Research Chair in Safety, Security, and Wellness, As an Individual): Thank you for having me here.

Unlike everyone before me, I don't have formatted speaking notes, but I'm going to speak to things and do my best to not repeat what has already been said.

I have been working in this field for 20 years or so. I work on the front line with people on the front line all the time.

When we look at it, in our society there are reactions to people who have completed crimes. They're gut reactions. They're often not what the data says. The persons who have committed some of the most violent crimes are those who are least likely to reoffend, such as lifers.

Of course, our system is designed in such a way as to hold a person accountable for their behaviours, once determined, but I don't think we ever ask this: When are we no longer punishing the person who committed the crime for those behaviours? Many crimes are committed before that frontal lobe is developed, and we are punishing these people for decades afterwards. For anyone in this room, are you the same person you were when you were 18 or 20?

What are we doing and how are we doing it? Is it conditions of release? Quite simply, we are a wealthy country, the 27th-wealthiest country in the world. We can do better, and that is clear. Many of the conditions don't really make sense today, such as IT restrictions. We are making it hard for people to succeed on parole, yet our parole rates and our lack of recidivism are incredible. I think we really need to address the larger system. We need real programming.

I'm sure we all recognize the cuts to programming within the Correctional Service of Canada. That very important primer, Lynn Stewart's article from 2017, talked about how we need the primer before the intensive programming so that people can succeed better. All men in CSC no longer are going to get it. Men are released from maximum security institutions, yet we have cut programs in maximum security institutions for men. Everyone's worried about sex offenders, yet we took the clinician away in doing that. It literally does not make sense.

Yes, we were talking about CORCAN, and it's great, but it's not in every prison. Those correctional programs are important. We need to give people purpose. We need to give them hope. If you want to see increased desistance, give people hope. Give people purpose. Maybe that will also help staff, who will not have to deal with the morally injurious reality of how we treat people who are incarcerated.

In focusing more on release, we need wraparound services. Any person I speak to who has been in prison says it would be great if they could learn skills inside and transition and continue to use them on the outside.

We can do more for supervision. Our parole stats are lovely, but at the end of the day, whose backs are they on? What are the caseloads? What are we doing to the people who are parole officers? What are we doing to the program officers? How are we giving these loads to individuals and then having concerns about releasing to the public when the value is on quantity and not quality? We cannot put our entire system on the backs of individuals who are strained.

Look at the coroner's report in this very province. There have been 17 correctional worker deaths in five years, and there are more. That's not all of them.

We need to do better. It's quite simple. On our federal framework to reduce recidivism, what about supporting desistance, measuring something that we hope doesn't happen, and being appreciative and positive?

I'm thinking of what my colleague said earlier. I think it's important. We need to support the therapeutic alliance between the parole officer and the person they are providing service to. What about the working alliance? When you stretch everyone so thin, you can't show negativity to the client, so now we're turning on each other, because everyone has too much work and the expectations are unreasonable.

Caseloads are over the top. Good outcomes come at what cost? How many lives? We have had over 60 deaths in custody this year, and we're losing staff. It's not just this massive retention that's gone. You can't recruit your way out of a retention problem. Also, we have a crisis of suicide.

What are we doing? We're the 27th-richest country in the world, and I can see programs.... We cut CEGEPs. I go to Uganda and watch a class graduating from the university, and we cut CEGEPs. Uganda is the 26th-poorest country in the world, and they have way more programs than we do. What you see is amazing.

● (1750)

We don't do enough for people working, those affected and the collateral consequences. We know that 61% of people working in that field have a mental health disorder, and over 35% have ideation.

I have to stop, but I have notes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Ricciardelli.

Let us turn to Mr. Yaqub for five minutes, please.

Omar Yaqub (Servant of Servants, Islamic Family and Social Services Association): *As-salamu alaikum*. *Tansi*. Peace, and good evening.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I serve the team at Islamic Family, a multi-award-winning social service and social change organization moving into its fifth decade of service. For the last decade, we have researched the needs of minority faith communities in prison, published academic papers, delivered services in prisons and halfway houses, and worked on re-entry at the systems level.

Islamic Family is an Imagine Canada-accredited charity, the winner of the Government of Alberta's Inspiration Award for its work combatting domestic violence, the Canadian Mental Health Association's professional service award and, important to this conversation, a justice innovation award for its work supporting people entangled with the justice system.

Because we serve survivors of violence, people leaving prison and service providers, we see many sides of the questions you are asking.

I want to start with stats. Muslims make up about 5% of Canada's population, but they are 9% of the official prison population and 11% of the observed population. Between 2014 and 2018, the number of Muslims in prison grew 20%. That gap is not small, and it's growing.

We were asked to speak to transparency and consistency in decision-making governing parole and long-term supervision. Our experience is that the current approach creates gatekeepers and inconsistency.

Gatekeepers are created by the procurement process. In 2013, federal chaplaincy moved from a public system to a single private contractor, an American-controlled company formerly known as Cons for Christ. A contractor competing on prices may have little reason to improve re-entry systems, especially for minorities. That should concern every Canadian.

After privatization, paid hours were limited to time inside institutions. Today, chaplains are no longer paid to build the community ties that support release. This cleave between prison and community undermines our collective goals. A chaplain is the bridge between a person in prison and their community, and a release plan depends on that bridge.

CSC's own 2019 evaluation committed to build those faith-community relationships earlier in the release process. A single contractor cannot represent every faith, let alone a contractor with a documented bias and a history of imposing arbitrary barriers and pay cuts on frontline staff. Our peer-reviewed research, based on interviews with minority faith chaplains, found that this model compromised spiritual care for minority-faith prisoners.

The 2013 change also meant that faith communities that know who is qualified and trusted, lost their role in hiring, oversight and, most importantly, reintegration.

We also want to highlight related gaps. Who is counted as a Muslim in prison is decided not by the person but by gatekeepers with different standards. One may demand five daily prayers. Another might take the person at their word. Access to halal food, a charter right, differs by province. Here is another example: CSC funeral requirements demand 48 hours' notice, but Muslims are typically buried within 24 hours. These are not side issues. Parole and supervision succeed only when people reintegrate into their communities, and arbitrary treatment of faith in prison undermines that.

Communities like mine are large, but we have not had the investment that more established communities have had to build chaplaincy and re-entry programs. The result is that people from communities facing multiple barriers and compounding crises are the least served when they leave prison.

I will leave you with three recommendations.

First, we need to co-develop, alongside civil society institutions, a national baseline for religious and cultural accommodation applied to federal and provincial custody and release. It should work with and fund civil society institutions to establish appropriate standards of care.

Second, we need to fund community re-entry capacity on a multi-year basis at the national level through an open, merit-based process by contracting faith communities directly for holistic support that includes chaplaincy, housing, mentoring, spiritual care and family support.

Finally, we need to publish disaggregated outcome data and religious accommodation complaints by faith and cultural groups so that we can measure the gap and close it.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This brings us to the question period for members.

Mr. Richards, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC): Thank you.

Mr. Yaqub, I'll start with you because I just heard something that I wasn't aware of. I think it's interesting that when a government has a bias against something, it seems to show up in a lot of places, and it seems as though there's a bias against faith communities.

We've seen it show up in things like student summer grants. We've seen it show up in my committee previous to this one—veterans affairs, which is fairly new to me. We heard a lot in that committee about military chaplains and how they have been, essentially, unable to speak about faith. They still exist, but they're not really able to do the job they were intended to do.

I just want to clarify and make sure that I did hear it correctly. Have chaplains been taken completely out of our correctional institutions, or is it similar to what's happened in our military, where they're just not able to actually act as chaplains?

Omar Yaqub: That's a fantastic question. I can speak a little to that.

What has happened is that we've privatized chaplaincy and awarded chaplaincy to a single contractor that has to provide a non-denominational chaplaincy model. I think that model, at the best of times, is circumspect. Maybe when someone's in a hospital and they need end-of-life care, a non-denominational approach might work.

In prison, when people have very deep questions, when they want to reconnect with their communities and those questions are complex, you actually need people who are conversant in their faith and who are established in that community so that they're serving the person in prison and out of prison.

That has been dismantled. That was something we had prior to 2013 when we had the public system, and it's something we need now.

Blake Richards: That clarifies it for me. It sounds like it is quite similar to what we've seen in our armed forces for those who would find some strength and some comfort in their faith.

In the case of our correctional institutions, we're talking about the ability to help someone reintegrate into the community at some point, because that can be a big part of it for many people. Although it exists, we're essentially making that role ineffective. That is really what's happening there.

I don't know if you would agree or disagree, or if you want to comment any further on that. I do have a couple of other questions for you. If you want to just keep that—

Omar Yaqub: I would agree. I would say that there's definitely a need for deeper integration. That person who's serving a person in prison needs to be able to answer their specific faith questions and support them when they leave prison. That requires supporting them to do that work. When we underfund that work and when we have a private contractor putting the salaries into their executives and not into the frontline workers, it leads to a poor system.

We have examples like the directed faith community reintegration project, the D-FCRP program. That's promising, but it needs to be deployed at a national scale.

Blake Richards: Thank you for that. I'm glad I'm aware of that now. It's troublesome, I think, to get another example of this bias against faith communities from the government.

Your organization, I believe, does work with victims of crime as well. Is that correct?

Omar Yaqub: That's correct.

Blake Richards: Okay. Can I just turn on that, then? We've heard from other witnesses previously about not being properly informed about parole hearings, last-minute changes, cancellations, not having proper information or awareness of what's going on in the process, and the impacts they see as a result of that.

Can you tell us if that's something you've heard from those you work with as well? Maybe tell us a little about some of the impacts of those kinds of things you've heard and what improvements you would suggest as a result.

● (1800)

Omar Yaqub: I'm not as much of an expert as some of the other people here, but I would say, in our team, what we see is the need for court navigators to support victims of crimes. This was a program for which we've seen pilots.

Something we've seen over the last few years is a reduction in the amount of translation available to support victims of domestic violence who might come from communities where English isn't their first language, and who often have a lot of trauma and trepidation entering a court. I think addressing the navigation of the court system is a very important component for victims of domestic violence.

Blake Richards: From the people you've worked with, have you heard these same kinds of complaints? In terms of not having the proper information about hearings and often having postponements and cancellations of these hearings at the last minute, have you heard those kinds of things from the victims your organization works with?

Omar Yaqub: I would say that there's some of that.

By and large, the major issue is one of systems navigation—having authoritative, trusted access to someone who can help them navigate the system and who understands what they need to do and what the next steps are, and having sufficient access to legal aid when they need it. Those continue to be persistent barriers, and they're compounded when people have even small barriers.

Blake Richards: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Powlowski, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses.

I'll mostly concentrate on Professor Munn and Professor Ricciardelli.

The question here seems to be, broadly speaking, are we going to make it easier or harder for parole? There are obviously two different perspectives. There's a pendulum there. My guess is that you've been around long enough to have seen that pendulum go back and forth. Both of you made some very excellent points about the system being adequate now, or perhaps that the pendulum even ought to swing a little farther to the side of making it easier for parole. You said that very few people on parole commit violent crimes, and that there needs to be the possibility of parole in order to motivate people.

Professor Munn, you talked about people having nothing left to lose being the most dangerous people.

Professor Ricciardelli, you said that we're not the same person as we were at 18. People need to have purpose.

For the two of you, it seems your emphasis is on rehabilitation. I'm not a professor of legal studies or a scholar of criminology, but it seems to me, from what little I've heard or read, that there are generally four considerations in sentencing, or four theories of punishment: retribution, deterrence, incapacitation and rehabilitation. You've talked about one of the four. How about the other three?

I think they are valid. If it were my kid, I'd want retribution, absolutely. However, I think that might also serve a positive social purpose. If you don't believe the state is going to dish out some retribution, it leads you to want to act on your own, and it becomes the wild west.

Deterrence is an important consideration.

Incapacitation is just to get somebody out of society.

You've both really emphasized rehabilitation, but are there not some valid reasons for wanting those other three things, which might lead to a more stringent position on parole?

Melissa Munn: I'll start there, and then I'll turn it over to my colleague.

There's a part in the Criminal Code about restitution. I think there are more than four under section 718. I'm not 100% sure, though, because I'm not a legal scholar either.

Deterrence is a useful concept, but in practice it rarely works. I will ask you to knock on your neighbour's door and ask them what the punishment in Canada is for murder. I would be shocked if any of them could answer that for you. I have neighbours who still don't believe me when I tell them that the punishment for homicide in Canada is, unequivocally, life. That is the minimum sentence people can be given. For deterrence to work, people need to know what the punishment's going to be. It has to be certain, swift and proportional, and people have to be aware of it. They just aren't. Relying on deterrence as a mechanism is flawed for that reason.

We're already doing retribution and incapacitation. That is what a life sentence does. It incapacitates you, potentially, until they put a toe tag on you.

My focus is on rehabilitation because I think that is where we can really have some influence postsentencing.

● (1805)

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I'm not going to echo anything there.

I think deterrence is really important, so I am echoing just one. However, it needs to be swift. For up to 80% of people in remand, we're reducing sentences because it can take so long—years and years—to get to trial, and because the conditions of confinement are so terrible. We're not doing all that great.

Prison is about incapacitation. The punishment is the time away and the loss. If you go into a prison and really look around, you will see a bare life. You will see people who have lost absolutely everything, for whatever reason. They have lost access to their children. You will see severe human suffering. I think we do retribution and incapacitation really well.

My focus, in this instance, is on rehabilitation because we don't do that well.

Marcus Powlowski: I like your answers. You both give very good answers. However, I would suggest that if you look at what the greater Canadian society believes, the belief is that the pendulum went too much towards leniency, too much towards rehabilitation and too much away from deterrence and incapacitation—just getting people away from committing crimes. Why do you think that is?

I mean, it might be easy enough to just blame it on the Conservatives, but it isn't just the Conservatives. I think there is a general societal impression that we were too liberal in our approach to crime.

Melissa Munn: I'd like to quote The Tragically Hip and say that nobody cares about what didn't happen. That was their song for David Milgaard, so it seems appropriate that I'm quoting it here.

You know, what works doesn't make a headline. When something's broken, a headline is generated, so we have a disproportionate representation of failure in our media headlines. People are very dependent on the media for their source of crime news. We have a reality TV industry built around terrible crime stories. I think it gives a misrepresentation of what's actually happening.

I agree with my colleague that if people could see inside a maximum-security prison in this country, they would be quite shocked at what they encounter there. They think that people are soft on crime and that prisoners are being fed steaks and lobster at night, but nothing could be further from the truth. I think we feed federal prisoners for less than $10 a day in this country—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Munn. I'm sorry to interrupt.

We need to turn to MP Fortin for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Munn, Professor Ricciardelli, Mr. Yaqub, thank you for joining us today.

I have a question for you, Professor Munn and Professor Ricciardelli.

Firstly, Professor Munn, I liked what you said at the start about the person who has had the greatest influence on our lives. Is it someone who punished us or someone who encouraged us? I'd never thought of it that way before, but I think it's a powerful metaphor for understanding the issue of rehabilitation.

That said, personally, I believe in the virtues of rehabilitation and I think it is possible to rehabilitate—not everyone, but most people who have committed crimes. However, it's not straightforward, and I don't know how to go about it. While I may think that everyone should be rehabilitated, I realize that the system isn't perfect. Some criminals are released and go on to commit further offences. I realize it's a small percentage, but even so, as we were saying just now, it is these individuals who dominate the news and capture the public imagination for a very long time. So that is a problem.

How can we limit the number of releases of repeat offenders? That is the first question.

The other adverse effect, if I may say so, of applications for parole is that there are victims who return to give evidence and who are traumatized, because for them it is like a second or, on occasion, a third or fourth trial. Often, these victims feel that too many applications for parole are granted, whereas, from the perspective of effective rehabilitation, we find that there are not enough. How can we strike a balance between the two?

I might have a possible solution. In fact, I'm not at all an expert on the issue of rehabilitation, which is why I'd like to hear your views on this. Would it not make sense to split the parole applications into two stages? For example, we could have a process where the Parole Board carries out an initial assessment to screen the applications and hear from the prisoner seeking release. If the board concludes that the prisoner cannot be released, there is no need to notify the victims or call them to give evidence, and the individual remains in custody. However, if the board agrees that there may be grounds to consider an application for release and decides to hold a hearing, the victims will be invited to give evidence.

By splitting the process in this way, could we not, on the one hand, minimize the trauma to victims by inviting them to give evidence only when necessary and, on the other hand, allow for conditional release in cases where it is appropriate?

Ms. Munn, you may answer the question first. Next, it will be Ms. Ricciardelli's turn.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Melissa Munn: Thank you for the question.

There is no doubt that victims are not well served in our current system. I think there's ample evidence of that. I've not heard anybody speak to the contrary, actually.

To my mind, at first blush the problem with the proposal you're making is that if there's a presumption—so the parole applicant has to go through the process twice for the same end result—then it, perhaps, becomes clunky and cumbersome. I also think that it's not necessarily fair for a victim to walk into a hearing at which the presumption is that this person is going to get parole. I think that might be quite traumatizing for somebody as well. I'm not sure it works.

I'll turn it over to Rosemary.

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I would also say that I think it would be poor practice to assume that a victim does not want to be part of the whole process, if they are so inclined, and they would need that opportunity as well. Separating it out...I understand the purpose behind it, but as with every very nuanced complication, there is no binary. There's not one correct thing that's going to meet all needs. It is complex.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

My idea wasn't a good one, so I'll withdraw it. That said, are there any other ideas?

How can we genuinely minimize the trauma to victims in this process without, at the same time, restricting applications for parole? I think it could be useful, so how can we have the best of both worlds?

[*English*]

Rosemary Ricciardelli: It's also complicated in that sense, because I think that parole and the whole process would be less traumatizing for victims if the court process and the policing process were also not so traumatizing. If we're looking at the last end of the correctional arm but not looking at what happens with police, what happens in court, what happens when a person is incarcerated and, then, what happens on parole. it's going to be very traumatizing because they haven't been treated well the whole time. Just fixing that is not going to fix it, and people, by that point, are pretty upset.

Melissa Munn: Could I add one thing? I think this is one thing that could help victims tremendously. In the case of life-sentenced prisoners, we need to adopt a policy in which there's a three-member board at all hearings and not a two-member board. When we have a two-member board, we can have a split decision, which means they have to restart the process, and then the victims have to go through it again. A very simple solution for the life-sentenced people is to make sure that there's a three-member board at all times.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Caputo, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Frank Caputo: Thank you very much to all of the witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Yaqub, for your answers, particularly for those you provided to my colleague Mr. Richards. I found great interest in this.

I'm saying sorry to my committee colleagues because they hear this way too often—Marcus is laughing, and we all know he's a doctor—but I take great interest in this as a former parole officer and as a former prosecutor.

I believe it was you, Professor Ricciardelli, who mentioned the trauma in the process of it all. Much of what you said resonates.

I want to explore a few things. One thing that's not in the Criminal Code is retribution as a sentencing principle, but the reality is that for everybody around this table here, if their daughter....

Professor Munn, you and I talked about the first murder I ever prosecuted, Taylor Van Diest. It was not far from where you are. For those unaware, a young woman, 18 years old, was walking along some railroad tracks on Halloween night at 6:30 p.m. and didn't make it to her friend's house. She was murdered because she said no to a sexual assault.

I participated in the first prosecution. It came back on appeal—not because of Frank—and now the perpetrator is doing a life sentence, with 16-year parole eligibility. I'm not sure if you realize this, Professor Munn, but he just had his first parole hearing.

It probably felt as though it was just yesterday when this happened. On an intellectual level, we can talk about 16 years. On a human level, it feels like it was just yesterday. When I'm talking about the Marie Van Diests of the world—Marie is Taylor's mom—it's sometimes easy for us here, as Monday morning quarterbacks, to talk about life sentences in Canada as being very difficult, but nowhere in the Criminal Code does “retribution” appear.

If you killed my daughter, I would be there every single time. If you were to tell me—and most people don't know this—that the threshold for whether somebody should get out of jail is not whether it is just but whether their risk is manageable in the community.... We hear from victims, but a victim's presence in the community rarely informs their manageability of risk. I think you know what I mean by that: It's about whether someone's risk is manageable regardless of where the victim is, yet we hear from victims.

Those things don't compute, and this is the injustice that people come to us with. When people come to me, they come to me about injustice. What we don't have in parole these days is a test of justice. We have it on bail, on what's called “tertiary grounds”. In sentencing, we have denunciation, which is different from deterrence: We say, “This is wrong.”

I'll give you two quick examples. I don't want to use all the time on my soliloquy here, but this is important.

In one, a judge in Vancouver had a sex offender approach the court for an application. She was shocked. She said, “I sentenced you to seven years in jail. What are you doing here two years later?” This is a judge saying, “I can't believe you're out of jail.” I will tell you right now, and this is anecdotal, that people are getting out of jail far earlier than they did 20 years ago. They are, and here's the example I will give. This happened in my home community.

Somebody was charged with leaving the scene of an accident causing death. Three international students died, and a fourth was severely injured. The person left the scene of the accident and got three years in jail. I'm not going to talk about the efficacy or appropriateness of that. That person was out on day parole in 10 months and on full parole in one year. If you were to present that sentence to a judge and say, “Judge, it's 10 months in jail, and that's it”, you might have thoughts.

These are the stories that get our attention as parliamentarians. Where is the justice?

Go ahead, please. Any of you can answer.

● (1815)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Frank Caputo: Oh, my gosh. I'm so sorry.

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I understand that victims.... The louder the story and the sadder the story, the more there's attention and the more we can say.

If we look at Scandinavian countries, we see a different society. It is people looking and saying, “Yes, they are of our society. How can we do better?” Think of restorative justice principles: What happened and why? How do we help? How do we support?

I understand that yes, it can feel harsh and it can feel difficult, but also, if it is a non-violent offender.... We are quadruple-bunking provincially in this province. We do not know where to put people in federal prisons, and yet you're talking about extending a life sentence to 35 years. Are you going to invest in our correctional service and do some good? Are we going to make people feel better? Are we going to help with rehabilitation so that they can actually appreciate and feel the guilt and the shame of their crimes? I think that's going to mean a lot.

● (1820)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Ricciardelli. I'm sorry to interrupt.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramsay, you have the floor for five minutes.

Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.): Professor Ricciardelli, when we met on Teams about a year ago, you were already telling me about the difficulties faced by correctional program officers, which you have also mentioned today. I tend to think you are right, because I am told that, when an offender is admitted to a federal prison, a correctional plan must be drawn up for them and that, by the time they attend their first parole hearing, in 94% of cases, that plan has not been finalized.

The way I see it, rather naively, is that, as part of these programs, the offender first learns to engage in a bit of self-reflection and to face up to their responsibilities. After that, they can take part in CORCAN programs, for example, to acquire specific skills. Finally, this work continues as part of the parole process.

However, Professor Munn tells us that there is no reoffending in 97%, 98% or 99% of cases. So I have a question for you. I am certainly not questioning the effectiveness of these programs, but, as a manager, one might wonder why we need these programs if there is almost never any reoffending and we have every reason to believe that rehabilitation is already very effective, with parole.

[*English*]

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I just want to make sure I understand clearly.

There's parole release and there's statutory release. Our parole rate's really good. Our statutory release is not as great. If people doing programs are more likely to not reoffend, why are we cutting them?

I just don't understand the question completely, in that sense.

Jacques Ramsay: The question, actually is.... I assume that the programs are much needed. There are not enough CPOs—correctional program officers—but at the same time, I hear that offenders are doing very well once they are back on the streets. They reoffend very few times.

What would be your argument to nevertheless reinforce and increase the programs for the inmates, to build on those programs and make them even more present, since the inmates don't seem to be reoffending once they're out on the street?

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I think you're saying that the programs are effective if they're not reoffending. I think the programs can do a lot more. I think the people delivering the programs, the correctional program officers, could do a lot more with them. There are many challenges in that space.

I think what you're really getting at is, what can we do to really help people on statutory release do better?

I also think that just because one does not reoffend does not mean that everything is cozy and beautiful in the outside world. There are housing problems. There are employment problems. There are many things that would increase their success that we are not doing for individuals. Yes, one might not reoffend, but they might be sleeping on the street.

It's very complex and I think there is much we can do to improve. Cutting those programs means.... What will happen with parole when people are released and we don't have them?

Jacques Ramsay: Thank you very much. You gave the answer that I wanted to hear.

Mr. Lloyd talked about CORCAN. He seems to think that the acquisition of skills is not really what it needs to be. Do you have any comments on CORCAN and improvements that we may bring to this program?

● (1825)

Melissa Munn: Listen, I love CORCAN. I thought it was a great initiative that we ran. I thought it gave people really good skills. It was a job that didn't have stigma, because to work there, you had to have a conviction. It was great.

I also have written extensively on this. Vocational training was the best rehabilitation program we ever had in this country. We've undermined that considerably. I think we heard earlier about that, so I won't go into details.

I think the expansion of education and vocational programming for people inside would be a brilliant choice. I think we need to guarantee access to those for lifers—people sentenced to life—prior to their eligibility date. Right now, people sentenced to life go to the bottom of the list, so they often cannot get into any of the programming or any of the educational opportunities. They really don't get maximum benefit from it during their incarceration.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry to interrupt. Unfortunately, that's all the time we have for this particular intervention.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to hear the witnesses' comments on another aspect.

Are we not being a little too lenient with prisoners? There is no presumed answer; I am simply asking the question.

Earlier, Professor Munn told us that the people who had had the greatest influence on our lives were those who had encouraged us, rather than those who had punished us. However, we can see that the prison system has changed significantly. The “solitary confinement cell”, as it was previously conceived, no longer exists. We have recently seen cases where prisoners, using drones, had food from McDonald's and a bottle of alcohol delivered to their cells. I realize this isn't legal or authorized, but we found it alarming. A simple solution might be to install nets in the yard to prevent this, but it all seems rather complicated.

When we speak to the managers of detention centres, they tell us they have no budget, that they are short-staffed and that they cannot carry out certain tasks with the detainees. I've even heard that officers can't search cells more than once a month. So, once they've been round, the prisoner knows that, for a month, they can do whatever they want and have whatever they want.

There's all sorts of information like this doing the rounds, which leads us to ask the following question: Are we managing our prisons properly, or should we not be a bit stricter—I'm not sure if that's the right word—or more rigorous when it comes to detention?

[*English*]

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I'll answer that.

What some people on the committee might not know is that I do a 10-year longitudinal study with correctional officers at CSC, and I'm also a trained CX for Correctional Service of Canada. I have done the training, so I can speak from that experience.

There are so many restrictions on what a person is able to do within the parameters of their work that it makes it impossible in many ways. One example I'll give you is how we have to search. If I go into a maximum security prison in Uganda and I get searched, I'm like, “Whoa, that's a search.” They ask me how I do it. I do the little pat-down just the way we're told. They ask, “How do you ever find anything?“ I say simply, “We don't.”

We have so many things, all the time, that prevent us from being able to do the work in the way it was intended. We really have to look at that.

The other thing is that what the media sees and what is actually happening are very different things. What gets picked up? Yes, there was the pigeon with a backpack and the drones. Let's do something. If you want to get rid of the drones, invest. We are not investing. I know we have a huge budget—one of the biggest in the world—and if we are investing, we're not using it very well. We have to do more.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Ricciardelli.

We'll end with two more interventions of two and a half minutes each, unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on the perspective.

Madam Kirkland, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Rhonda Kirkland: I'm sure my Liberal colleague will give me their two and a half minutes. I'm convinced of it.

Thank you, Dr. Munn, for what you brought up at the beginning regarding encouragement versus punishment. You really made me stop and think of who that person was.

For me, that was my mother, who has passed. She was always encouraging, but that didn't come without punishment. I would say that there was an absolute balance between the encouragement and the punishment. She made me understand that actions have consequences, and she made me face the consequences of my actions.

My answer to that would be both.

Dr. Ricciardelli, I'm really appreciative of your work and your study on the mental health and well-being of correctional officers. I would love to see you do CBSA next. I believe that they're struggling as well.

Your research has extensively examined the working conditions of federal parole and corrections officers. How important are these employees in identifying whether an offender is genuinely prepared for release?

● (1830)

Rosemary Ricciardelli: They are essential. They know, and program officers do too. A program officer hears everything, learns everything and helps monitor. Parole officers know the individual. The correctional officers know what that person is doing. They don't have a loud enough voice.

One of my comments, before I ran out of time, was that the connection between the Parole Board of Canada and CSC needs to be strengthened. Everything is operating as these separate little arms flailing around. It needs to be connected.

Rhonda Kirkland: I appreciate that. Thank you.

I know we have met before, and we discussed a case that was happening in Oshawa at the time, Darren Scott Ray. I've mentioned it in this committee many times. Temporary absences were given, despite acknowledgement of serious behavioural concerns at the corrections level. Durham Regional Police officers were very concerned about the safety of our community.

I feel that the Parole Board has a duty to make sure that the risk assessment can be managed. If officers on the ground are responsible for supervising an offender and they're already overburdened, how do you think the parole system and the Parole Board can reasonably conclude that the individual's risk is manageable, and who's accountable if that assessment is wrong?

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I think that is very challenging.

One of the things I know from my work with parole officers, over 150 of whom I have interviewed, is that when a parole officer puts out a recommendation and it is overlooked and overturned, and the person goes on to reoffend or a person stays incarcerated when they should be out, it is morally injurious and harmful.

We have an extremely high prevalence of mental health disorders and suicide. We need to treat people better. I know I keep saying that.

Rhonda Kirkland: Thank you.

Rosemary Ricciardelli: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Kirkland.

Madam Sodhi, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes, please.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Professor Munn, earlier you mentioned a recommendation to have three Parole Board of Canada board members instead of two, to prevent victim retraumatization if a split decision is made.

Are you able to expand on this recommendation and any others you might have to reduce victim retraumatization in the parole process?

Melissa Munn: To my knowledge, when you go before the board, if there are only two members and one says yes and one says no, then the process is restarted. They have to bring in another member, and that member has to be part of a whole process, so it starts again.

That's awful for everybody. It's awful for the applicant, it's awful for the board members, and it's awful for the victims. It would be great if we could stop that from happening.

We could definitely have all the paperwork together. One of the problems we have is the programming. The access to resources that we've all been droning on about sometimes causes the delays that so impact the victims and make them unable to get to the hearings when they want to be there. If we had better resources so that people could get their psych assessments and all the reports they need for a full file, we would not have the delays.

We need better resourcing for the programming and for the workers in the system to be able to do their reports.

Amandeep Sodhi: Okay.

Are you aware of any best practices that are used around the world? What are some countries that we can use as examples? Ms. Ricciardelli, I know you mentioned Scandinavian countries and Uganda. What can we do?

Rosemary Ricciardelli: I would look to the continent of Africa and what they do. It is so impressive, and nobody looks to them. We are so myopic as a country. We have an untapped set of resources.

In the Mbarara prison complex, there is a school. The principal is an incarcerated individual, and so are all the teachers. They are teaching and doing exams. If you want to go to university, you transfer to Kampala region and do university at Makerere, which is the best one there. Then, if you want to be a lawyer, they have an exchange program with the University of London.

They're the 26th-poorest country in the world. I could continue to show you guys what they do. What are we, too ignorant to look at another country just because it's not as wealthy? Go see it.

Go to Kenya. See what they're doing. It's amazing. Go to Namibia or Zimbabwe. Even in Singapore, there are positives to the Yellow Ribbon Project. Go and see Japan. They have voluntary parole: Jump on and off as you need it. Why aren't we looking around the world? I was just at the UN, learning from Malawi and Mongolia.

It's different. We can apply it, but we have to stop focusing and thinking we're doing everything. As I said last week, we have to be humble and recognize that we have problems, and we need to be open to talking about them, because if we pretend we don't have problems, we're never going to learn.

● (1835)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that great exchange.

Thank you, Madam Munn, Madam Ricciardelli and Mr. Yaqub, for taking the time to prepare and come before us.

We'll wish you a good remainder of the day.

As for all the MPs, I have a couple of logistical things to share with you.

[*Translation*]

I'll start by explaining what will happen at the upcoming meetings.

There will be no meeting next week. We'll be in our constituencies, so there will be no meeting on November 9 or November 11.

On Monday, November 16, upon our return from last week's time in our constituencies, we will devote the meeting to the consideration of Bill C-240 and, in particular, to hearing from witnesses.

On Wednesday, November 18, and Monday, November 23, we will be hearing from witnesses as part of the scrutiny of Bill C-263.

That is what we will be doing over the next three weeks.

That said, I wish you all a good evening.

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