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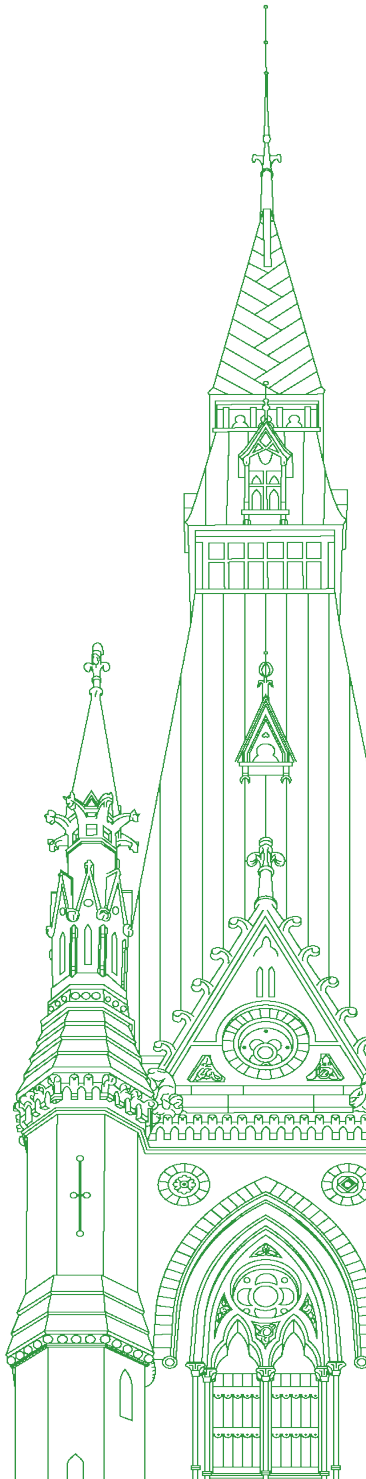

Chair: Jean-Yves Duclos

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Monday, November 16, 2026

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 56 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, October 22, we are meeting today to study Bill C-240, an act to amend the Criminal Code, to make related amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

First of all, on behalf of all members of the committee, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the witnesses, starting with the Honourable Senator Patrick Brazeau. Next, we have Kelly DeRidder, who is a member of the House of Commons, as you know. She's our colleague from Kitchener Centre. Finally, as individuals, we have Kelly Gates and Spencer St. Amand. Mr. St. Amand is the executive director of Building Blocks from Barriers.

Each witness will have five minutes to speak.

Mrs. DeRidder, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today on my own private member's bill, Bill C-240.

I want to start by asking everyone to think about someone they love: a child, a parent, a sibling, a friend. Now, imagine that person is struggling with addiction. Imagine the phone calls you're afraid to answer, the nights you can't sleep and the constant worry that the next time you hear their name it will be because they are gone.

For many families across this country, this isn't something they have to imagine. This is their reality.

Addiction is tearing families apart, taking lives and leaving communities searching for answers. While we have spent years talking about this crisis, we need to start asking ourselves a difficult question: Are we actually giving people a way out of their addiction, or are we just maintaining their suffering?

I brought this bill forward not just as a member of Parliament but as someone who has lived experience with addiction and homelessness. I know what it means to struggle. I know what it means to lose your way, to make decisions that you wish you could take back and to feel the person you once were slipping further and further away, but I also know something else: I know that recovery is possible. People can recover. They can rebuild relationships, reconnect with their families, find jobs and become contributing members of their communities. I am living proof.

I believe that our justice system should reflect this possibility. Right now, we have an opportunity to do more than simply send someone to prison and hope that things will be different when they walk out the door. We have an opportunity to use that time to help people make changes in their lives.

This is what Bill C-240, the offender rehabilitation act, is about. This legislation would allow courts to prescribe rehabilitation measures as part of an offender's sentence, including treatment, mental health supports, education, skills training and an opportunity to heal from their trauma by making these things count towards parole decisions. Also, it would recognize the harm caused by large-scale fentanyl traffickers by making it an aggravating factor in sentencing. This bill is intended to heal and to help someone build a happy, healthy life on the other side of addiction, while ensuring that those who profit off vulnerability are held to account.

These measures are about accountability. They are about recognizing that when someone commits a crime, there must be consequences, but accountability and rehabilitation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that we are missing the accountability aspect when we fail to look at the issues contributing to someone's repeated offences.

People need to make their own choices and be accountable in order to heal. If someone is struggling with addiction, serving time alone does not address the addiction. If someone leaves custody without the tools, treatment or support they need, what have we really accomplished? We cannot keep repeating the same cycles and expecting a different outcome.

I've heard from families who are exhausted, families who have tried everything they can think of to help someone they love and families who have watched someone cycle through the justice system with an addiction and see the same cycle repeat itself over and over. They do not want to keep burying their loved ones. They want to see people get well, and we do as well.

I know that recovery is not easy. It takes work, commitment, support and, above all, a desire to take the first step. This is not a straight line, and it doesn't happen overnight. This means that we should never stop creating opportunities for people to take that first step.

I am standing here today as proof that someone who has struggled with addiction can recover, someone who has experienced homelessness can rebuild their life and someone who has made mistakes can still have a future worth fighting for. I want our justice system to recognize that potential in everyone else too.

Bill C-240 is an opportunity to move beyond the system that simply contains a problem and towards one that actively creates a pathway to recovery, rehabilitation and safer communities, because those who struggle with addiction can turn it around. They can come home to their families. They can rebuild their lives and have an amazing, happy, healed life on the other side of addiction.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. DeRidder.

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

Hon. Patrick Brazeau (Senator, Quebec (Repentigny)): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the chance to speak to Bill C-240, the offender rehabilitation act.

I want to talk about recovery and, specifically, abstinence-based recovery, because I know it works, and I too am living proof of it.

I have been sober for more than six years and over two million minutes without a single drop of alcohol, and every one of those minutes has been a fight. Alcohol took me down a very dark path. It wrecked my relationships and my physical and mental health. It contributed to my suicide attempts, and it was there when I was fighting colon cancer.

Like 75% of Canadians, I had no idea that alcohol causes seven fatal cancers. I was in the dark and I almost didn't make it out, but I did, and I know recovery is possible. Addiction does not have to be a life sentence. People can get well and restore their health, their dignity and their place in their families and communities. This is what the bill is all about.

[*Translation*]

The preamble of Bill C-240 gets it right: Families are being destroyed by substance addiction, and safe supply approaches that keep people dependent do not foster recovery. What we need is compassionate intervention that holds people accountable while giving them a real chance at rehabilitation.

This bill would give courts the ability to order, in addition to imprisonment, measures during the custodial period such as education, job training, writing a letter to victims to acknowledge the harm caused and, where the offender agrees and a program is available, treatment.

Those measures would be incorporated into the correctional plan, and the Parole Board of Canada would take the individual's progress into account. Release is earned, and personal responsibility is baked right into the process.

● (1110)

[*English*]

I am not soft on crime, but if we only punish and never offer a structured path out of addiction, we will keep recycling the same people through the system. For too many of them, that ends in a death sentence. Recovery reduces reoffending, and that serves public safety.

Both sides of this debate are responding to real pain. Overdose deaths are real and tragic, and no one should die alone on a sidewalk, but keeping a person alive while they remain dependent is not the same as helping them recover. Bill C-240 offers a middle path, pairing real accountability with abstinence-based treatment inside the system.

Many people in custody live with addiction. Alcohol is a major driver of crime, family violence, mental health crises and health harm. This is why structured, abstinence-based treatment in custody has to be real and available, and Correctional Service Canada must have the capacity to deliver it, including culturally appropriate and gender-specific options. Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected, and we need programs that work for all of our communities.

Prevention is the other half. In my case, I introduced Bill S-202 in the Senate. It would put clear health warning labels on alcoholic beverages, covering the causal link between alcohol and seven fatal cancers, what a standard drink is, how many are in the container and the limits Health Canada says should not be exceeded.

Canadians have a right to this information. Today, tobacco and cannabis carry warnings, yet alcohol, a group one carcinogen that causes more harm than all the other substances combined, still gets a free pass.

[*Translation*]

Bill S-203, which I also introduced in the Senate, would prohibit the promotion of alcoholic beverages, just as we already restrict the promotion of tobacco and cannabis. It would protect young people from constant inducements to drink and reduce the social and health costs that bring people into the very system Bill C-240 is trying to fix.

I introduced these bills because of what I lived through. I didn't know the risks, and most Canadians still don't. I live one day at a time, and I am proud to be sober. In fact, it's cool to be sober. My recovery was for me and for my family. However, this legislation is for the next generation, for young people who should not have to grow up in the same darkness that I experienced. Every Canadian who is struggling deserves the same support and the same chance that I had.

I urge the committee to support Bill C-240 and to ensure that the treatment pathways it creates are real, accessible and focused on recovery. People can change. Families can heal. Communities can be safer. Recovery works.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator.

Ms. Gates, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Kelly Gates (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am here today to direct parliamentary members' attention to a tragedy hiding in plain sight, one that you drive past and ignore every single day. It is on the doorsteps of our local offices, in our cities and in our emergency rooms. I am speaking about our children—the thousands of young people who are currently surviving on the streets, trapped in a devastating cycle.

I am specifically speaking about my granddaughter Kay-Dee, who has lived on the streets, off and on, starting at the age of 11. The day my 11-year-old granddaughter ran away from home, our comfortable world crashed around us. Kay-Dee has FASD and ADHD. Before this, we were a normal family, going to pumpkin farms, visiting Santa and spending summers at the cottage. We thought we had checked all the boxes. The shame, guilt and stigma we felt when we realized our 11-year-old granddaughter was addicted to crystal meth was overwhelming. Overnight, Kay-Dee became that girl, and we became those grandparents.

No child chooses the streets. For a homeless child, drugs are a survival mechanism to numb the freezing cold, stay awake through dangerous nights to avoid assault and silence the pain of abandonment. However, survival cannot be the benchmark of success in a country as prosperous as ours. We cannot arrest our way out of this crisis. Criminalizing these children pushes them further into the shadows, making them easy prey for exploitation and trafficking. Our police can do nothing for a child aged 11, except a basic wellness check. My granddaughter was only in grade 5.

There is an absolute failure in our infrastructure for kids under 16. Right now, there are zero specialized rehabs in Ontario for a child under 16 years old. Kay-Dee is now 15. The system forces families to navigate a red tape maze that even an adult would find impossible. Kay-Dee was denied rehab in Ottawa. Out-of-province programs like Portage in Quebec and New Brunswick initially denied her because the government said that they didn't check all the boxes to help with the costs. A program in B.C. accepted her, but it was for only six weeks and cost $25,000. She didn't need six weeks; she needed six months. We were able to get Kay-Dee into a long-term Portage program in New Brunswick only because she is indigenous. Family and children's services paid the bill, hoping to be refunded by the Jordan's principle funding.

I ask this committee, what if she wasn't indigenous? What do other desperate parents and grandparents do? Portage is an excellent program, but our system is not equipped for what Kay-Dee truly needs. Four years of drug use on the streets have compounded her FASD and ADHD with dissociative identity disorder and severe seizures.

Today Kay-Dee is in school in Truro, Nova Scotia. I've had to set up an entire village from Ontario to support her, with health workers, outreach workers, a neurologist and a psychiatrist. When I reached out to children's services in Nova Scotia for localized help, I was told that she is Ontario's problem. I've been flying back and forth on a monthly basis, sometimes after even shorter periods of time.

Today Kay-Dee sounds like a success story, but because of her complex medical needs, I constantly worry about tomorrow. We need new laws and dramatic structural changes. We must invest in early intervention and long-term, trauma-informed youth rehabilitation centres. If we are examining legislative frameworks for Bill C-240, we must ensure that they are paired with actual, accessible provincial beds and specialized health care infrastructure.

Drugs steal away so much. They take and take—until, finally, every time a drug goes into a child, something else is forced out, such as love, hope, trust or confidence. The measure of our society is how we treat our most vulnerable. When a child falls through the cracks, it is our collective responsibility to catch them.

I have submitted Kay-Dee's full story in my written brief. Included at the very end of the brief is a poem she wrote during her first week in a locked mental health unit. I urge every member of this committee to read her words. Look at the gaps in our system and help us build the infrastructure required to bring our children home.

Thank you.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. St. Amand, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Spencer St. Amand (Executive Director, Building Blocks from Barriers, As an Individual): Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee.

First, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share my perspective on Bill C-240, the offender rehabilitation act.

My name is Spencer St. Amand. I'm the executive director of Building Blocks from Barriers, which is an organization focused on rehabilitation, mentorship and helping individuals overcome barriers for a successful reintegration into the community.

Before I held that title, I was someone who experienced many of those barriers first-hand. I spent much of my life struggling with addiction, involvement in the criminal justice system and incarceration. Today, I stand before you as someone who has experienced the correctional system from the inside and who now works to help others build a different future.

I'm here today because I support Bill C-240. I believe rehabilitation must be more than an expectation placed on the individual. It must be an opportunity that the correctional system is prepared to provide. Throughout my experience with incarceration, I came to recognize the significant disconnect between what the correctional system identifies as rehabilitation and what individuals need to succeed once they return to society.

Correctional institutions offer core programming, and I do not want to dismiss the importance of those programs. However, much of the system's approach to rehabilitation appears to be focused on measurable institutional outcomes, program completion, individual behaviour, risk assessments and compliance. These measurements have their place, but they do not necessarily demonstrate whether someone is prepared to live successfully outside the prison walls. There is a difference between teaching someone how to function inside an institution and preparing them to succeed outside of one.

For individuals with repeat involvement with the criminal justice system, that distinction is especially important. We cannot continue measuring rehabilitation solely by how well someone follows institutional rules, completes assigned programs and reaches their statutory release date. We need to ask much more important questions: What have we done to prepare this individual for the responsibilities, challenges and opportunities waiting for them upon release? Can they find employment? Can they maintain stable housing? Can they navigate relationships, manage their emotions, access community resources and make decisions without returning to the behaviours that brought them into the system? These are the foundations of a successful reintegration.

From my experience, the system can sometimes feel more focused on managing an individual's sentence than preparing the individual for life after incarceration. I do not believe this means that correctional staff are intentionally setting people up for failure, but I do believe that rehabilitation is measured primarily through the institutional compliance rather than long-term community success. We risk creating a system that unintentionally contributes to repeated incarceration.

This is why I support Bill C-240. Allowing the courts to prescribe meaningful rehabilitation measures, including education, vocational training and treatment, creates the opportunity to make rehabilitation a more deliberate part of an individual sentence.

However, I believe there's one important consideration that must accompany this legislation. If we are going to require individuals to participate in rehabilitation, we must also ensure that those opportunities are genuinely available to them. An individual should never be at a disadvantage in their correctional progress or parole considerations because they were unable to access a program that the institution cannot provide. Accountability must exist on both sides. Individuals must take responsibility for their actions and their rehabilitation, but the institution must also be accountable for providing meaningful opportunities for change.

I would also like to address the provisions concerning large-scale fentanyl trafficking. I support stronger sentencing measures for those who knowingly profit from large-scale distribution of fentanyl. The devastation caused by the drug has affected families and communities across the country. Those responsible for exploiting addiction for financial gain must be held accountable.

However, I believe we must be careful not to overlook the circumstances surrounding an individual's involvement. There are vulnerable people, particularly young women, who are manipulated, threatened, exploited and coerced into transporting and distributing drugs by individuals who deliberately take advantage of their circumstance. Some may be dealing with addiction, abusive relationships, homelessness or threats to their personal safety. We must ensure that our sentencing laws distinguish between those who organize and profit from large-scale trafficking and those who are coerced into participating.

● (1120)

I would encourage the committee to consider explicit safeguards requiring courts to carefully examine evidence of coercion, exploitation and the individual's actual role in the offence when applying proposed aggravating factors.

Holding people accountable should never mean ignoring the circumstances under which the actions occurred.

In closing, I believe a true measure of our correctional system should not simply be how effectively we manage people while we're incarcerated, but how successfully it prepares them to return to society.

Today, through Building Blocks from Barriers, I am working to provide mentorship, education and practical reintegration support, which I believe are essential to lasting change.

My own life demonstrates that the change is possible, but possibility alone is not enough. People need to access the tools, opportunities and support that allow them to turn possibilities into reality.

Rehabilitation should not end at the prison gates, and accountability should not rest solely on the shoulders of the individual.

If we truly want to reduce repeat offending, strengthen public safety and create safer communities, we must build a correctional system that prepares people not simply to complete their sentences, but to build a meaningful life beyond them.

I support Bill C-240 because I believe it represents an opportunity to move further in that direction.

● (1125)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. St. Amand. I will have to interrupt you very soon. Do you want to conclude?

Spencer St. Amand: Thank you for your time.

I welcome any questions from the committee.

The Chair: That was very timely and well done. Thank you.

Let us now turn to MPs for questions and comments, starting with MP Lloyd for six minutes, please.

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for coming here today.

This seems like common sense to me. If people have been found guilty, they've been convicted, they've been sentenced to prison, why not use this very important time to help people turn their lives around?

My first question will be for Mr. St. Amand.

Ultimately, for the person this will impact, even if a court orders this rehabilitation, it's really still up to them to decide how they're going to interact with that rehabilitation program, is it not?

Spencer St. Amand: It is, and I think that's a great question. The importance of it is that we're not just doing the same thing. We're not sentencing somebody to something better that isn't available. There has to be a lot more progress within the institutions so that we can strengthen programming and opportunities for people. Then, when they do get there, they have that access, and they can make some serious changes when they fulfill the sentence. We can then integrate them back into society positively.

Dane Lloyd: I appreciate that, and I appreciated what you said about how accountability has to go both ways. In some of our previous studies and some of the reports I've seen from the Office of the Correctional Investigator, Correctional Service Canada...and maybe you can tell me if this is your experience, or maybe Ms. Gates can. Are these programs widely available in our correctional system? Is there enough capacity to support people who are even seeking out these programs, let alone people who are being ordered by the courts to participate in these programs?

Spencer St. Amand: From my experience, when we enter the institution, there are opportunities that are available in there, but they are based on security level. People who have low security—low risk—have more opportunity, but that's not really the problem. They can integrate back into society because they're already at a low risk, but you want to target it more towards somebody who is the repeat offender, who is at a higher risk and who has less opportunity because it's a lot harder to get them to where they need to be.

It's kind of backwards. We need to focus more on helping people who have a higher risk and give them more opportunity to reintegrate, because those are the problems. These people are the ones I see coming back.

Dane Lloyd: Thank you for that.

Madame Gates, thank you for the story of your granddaughter and thank you for the work you've done. We know that families are one of the most important social safety nets that we have in our society. The work that you've done with her is tremendous. The first question I will ask, and then I'll have a follow-up, is this: How would legislation such as this help somebody like your granddaughter?

Second, I would like your reflections on when somebody is suffering from severe FASD or ADHD. Do you think they would have the capacity to engage with these programs of their own volition, or do you think that it is helpful for courts to order these people to participate in such programs, which will increase take-up and accountability, and it is to be hoped...outcomes?

Kelly Gates: Because of Kay-Dee's mental health, it's definitely a harder struggle than for most normal kids who just get on drugs or whatever. Kay-Dee was not actually sentenced, and she does not have a criminal record. We were very fortunate to that end, because we worked with the police and all of that to make sure she didn't.

We swept her away from Ontario to New Brunswick, where she couldn't leave. There was no way that she.... Where would she go? She didn't know anybody, so she had to accept the program. If that were offered in Ontario....

If you read my brief, you'll know that, because she's indigenous, at a young age she went to a youth lodge in Ohsweken. When she went at age 11, she was very successful. When she went at age 15, she just made a phone call: People picked her up and brought her back. We went back to court because, for a mental illness, we have only seven days to get into a mental illness facility. Every week I'd go back until she was finally picked up again. That's when we swept her off and took her to New Brunswick, where she couldn't leave—

● (1130)

Dane Lloyd: I'm sorry to cut you off. I have limited time. This is very interesting, but my question is this: For somebody like your granddaughter, who is caught up in the criminal system, who has similar challenges, do you think they have the capacity to meaningfully participate in these programs by their own volition, or do you think it's helpful that this legislation seeks to prescribe that?

Kelly Gates: She definitely needs to be prescribed that.

Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Are there any other ways that you think this legislation could help people in a similar situation?

Maybe I'll leave this to Kelly. How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair? I have 45 seconds.

Ms. DeRidder or Senator Brazeau, do you have any final thoughts on that?

Kelly DeRidder: I'll just give a thought, and then I'll hand it over to the senator.

The first thing is that this legislation is meant for people who are already serving to, instead of just serving time, take time for themselves. That's the key to this legislation: to break cycles, turn their life around and live a healed life on the other side of addiction.

This is also going to help their children, because their children can then heal from the trauma that was caused by having their parent incarcerated. It heals the next generation too.

The major thing is to take time to heal yourself instead of just serving time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brazeau, I propose that we come back to you a little later so that we have more time.

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

[*English*]

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today. Most importantly, I want to thank all of you for being vulnerable in front of us and for sharing your stories. I feel as though, sometimes, when you're going through things in life or when you have gone through things in life, it might not even be easy to talk to your friends or your family in that moment. The fact that you guys are all here in front of the public safety committee is truly commendable. Thank you so much for doing that.

MP DeRidder, I have a lot of respect for you. Thank you so much for your hard work on this bill. We know that one of the most important aspects of this legislation is its recognition that the justice system has a role to play in supporting individuals as they work towards recovery and reintegration. We know that substance abuse can be a contributing factor to criminal behaviour, and that addressing those underlying challenges can be an important part of preventing reoffending. Why is it important to you to bring legislation that places greater emphasis on rehabilitation and recovery within Canada's correctional system?

Kelly DeRidder: The number one reason is to change the mentality that we have right now, which is, “You're addicted, so let's just help you with your addiction”, towards focusing more on abstinence-based recovery in Canada, because abstinence-based recovery works. The more people we can support through that, through the healing, through what's required to come out on the other side of their addiction, the better off we'll be in our communities and in Canada as a whole, and we're not going to see what we're seeing today.

This is a piece of the puzzle, incorporating recovery into our institutions, but it isn't the end of it. It's a national focus...starting to focus more on how people can and do recover. Everybody sitting here has recovered, as has Kay-Dee, so it's a possibility. We have to meet people where they are and then give them the opportunity to heal when they're ready to do so.

Amandeep Sodhi: How did you arrive at the particular range of rehabilitation measures included in the bill, and what was the thinking behind selecting these specific interventions?

Kelly DeRidder: The bill itself is quite high-level in the interventions: It has skill training, mental health supports and rehabilitation. With the understanding that addiction is complex and that one individual is not the same as another, it's really important that the judge is able to understand the offender and to prescribe specific rehabilitation measures to that individual. It isn't checking a box. It isn't completing specific programming, as Mr. St. Amand said. It isn't just, “Do what you do while you're institutionalized.” It's going to be focused on the individual and what they need in order to heal and recover so that, when they leave the institution, they have more of a successful life and integration into community.

● (1135)

Amandeep Sodhi: How do you see accountability and access to treatment working together to help these individuals?

Kelly DeRidder: A key part of healing is taking accountability for your own actions. The root cause of all addiction is trauma, absolutely, and you have to heal from this trauma. However, you've also made bad decisions that you have to be accountable for in order to truly heal.

It is ensuring that someone takes accountability for their actions but then has the support to walk through the healing and even the self-forgiveness. The things that need to happen to truly heal and be on the other side of addiction all go hand in hand. You can't do one without the other.

Amandeep Sodhi: Of course.

I'm going to move to you, Senator Brazeau. We know that the transition from incarceration back into the community can be a particularly challenging period for individuals who are working towards recovery. From your perspective, what supports can help individuals maintain their recovery following their release?

Then, Mr. St. Amand, would you like to answer the same question afterwards?

Senator Patrick Brazeau: Thank you very much for the question.

The main supports are family and friends—if the individual in question has the benefit of having such support groups while reintegrating. If they don't have any family and friends, they should certainly find any support groups that are out there. Unfortunately, many times across the country they are hard to find, and that's the problem. We don't focus enough on rehabilitation. Rather, we look at an individual and we throw out all the stereotypes, “Well, this person is struggling with addiction, and it's up to that person to get fixed.” Well, it's difficult. It's almost impossible.

In my personal case, when I went to long-term therapy, the first thing we were told when we got there was that there was a 2% success rate. It's very difficult when there are not enough programs across the country right now that work.

This bill, as Ms. DeRidder said, is a piece of the puzzle. I think it'll go a long way, in the future, towards having people start developing these programs so that people can take advantage of them, and when they do reintegrate, they become full members of society again.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille (Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. St. Amand. I enjoyed reading your speech as well. We received it in advance, so I was able to read it in French. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Ms. Gates, for your moving testimony about your granddaughter.

Thank you, Mr. Brazeau, for your candour.

Thank you, Mrs. DeRidder, for introducing this bill. A number of questions come to mind because your bill says that the courts can impose a treatment program. I have questions about the whole issue of consent. Rehabilitation or recovery begins with a personal willingness to accept treatment.

Mr. Brazeau, you said that, when you began treatment, it first required a personal commitment on your part. Do you feel that people who are forced to undergo treatment have a real chance of succeeding if, at the outset, they don't have the desire to overcome their addiction and substance use disorder?

Senator Patrick Brazeau: That's a very good question.

In terms of imposing treatment, I'm going to talk about my personal experience again. About 12 years ago, I had to make a choice: Either I stayed in prison until my trial or I went to a treatment centre. It was a very easy decision to make.

I don't want to go into the details of the therapy I underwent, but you should know that therapy at the time, in Quebec, was a market operated by private companies. That meant that the focus wasn't necessarily on rehabilitating the person. It was more a matter of making a bit of money.

I am not against a judge having the power to order someone who has been sent to prison and handed a sentence of some kind to undergo therapy. Even though therapy, in my case, did not help me immediately, it stayed with me. After a few years, it helped me completely stop my substance abuse.

● (1140)

Claude DeBellefeuille: The Bloc Québécois will certainly support the bill, because we strongly believe in social reintegration. We think that people who have committed a crime should serve their sentence in incarceration. However, when they are released, since every inmate eventually gets out, it is up to the system to make them better citizens and equip them to face their new life, reintegrate into society and contribute to their community. We believe very strongly in that.

That said, I have some questions. Right now, it's very easy to bring drugs into prisons. I have visited a number of penitentiaries. Correctional officers tell us that drugs come into federal penitentiaries quite easily.

The government has also reduced training time. In Quebec, as Mr. Brazeau knows, the Correctional Service of Canada signed a contract with the Cégep Marie-Victorin so that inmates could finish high school. It cost $200,000. That was shut down.

Mrs. DeRidder, are you introducing this bill because you see that the services inmates with addictions currently receive are inadequate?

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: Yes, absolutely. That's why it's putting accountability on to everybody to have it judge-prescribed, because then the institutions need to provide the programming.

You brought up a really valid point about how there are drugs inside the institutions, as well as how, now, we want to focus on rehabilitation. These two things can't be true at the same time: We can't have drugs in institutions and try to heal people from their addiction inside the institutions as well. They're going to have to crack down on the drugs inside of the institutions. I hope that one repercussion of this bill's going through is that the prisons reform...how many drugs are inside and figure out how to get them out of the institutions in order to provide the services that are required, that are judge-prescribed.

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Do you currently consider that Correctional Service Canada is succeeding in its mission by investing in reintegration, treatment programs and training or apprenticeship programs for inmates?

Do you think efforts need to be made in that area as well?

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: I would like Mr. St. Amand to answer that, because he came straight from an institution. I'd like to give him the opportunity to say whether the current training programs....

Spencer St. Amand: As I said before, there are lots of opportunities inside the institution, but it's based on the security level. They were hitting people with low security ratings. They get these opportunities to participate and have access to programs that are essential to people who might be repeat offenders.

As you said, there are drugs inside the institution, and it comes down to whether people want to do the right thing. When we're prescribing some sort of sentencing, if we're able to take the freedom away from somebody for committing a crime, why can't we give them the access to something more positive if that's a decision they want to make? We're still committing....

In Canada, it doesn't matter. We're getting released at some time. It doesn't matter the sentence. We don't have natural life sentences. Eventually, at some point, somebody is going to be released, regardless of their security level, so why not give everybody the opportunity to be successful once they are released? It shouldn't matter on a security level. We should give everybody that opportunity.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille and Mr. St. Amand.

Mr. Richards, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC): I'll start with you, Ms. DeRidder.

Thank you very much for your initiative in bringing forward this important piece of legislation.

I want to touch on this: We've seen the policies of this government here in Ottawa, and of others, wherein there have been millions of dollars spent supporting so-called safe supply programs. That's led to our communities being flooded with illicit drugs. It's achieved the exact opposite of the intended goal.

I want to give you an opportunity to speak to your bill and to the fact that there would be court-ordered addiction treatment. Why is that so important for breaking the cycle of addiction and getting these drugs off the streets?

Kelly DeRidder: Harm reduction is the piece we disagree on, 100%. I do not agree with harm reduction, but the current government does, and so do others. I think that's a conversation we need to move away from. Focus on what we do agree on: recovery and rehabilitation.

Harm reduction, to me, is palliative care for addiction: “Let's keep everybody comfortable until they die anyway.” That's what's happening in communities. Eventually, someone will be alone, and they're going to overdose. It happens over and over. The Waterloo region had two overdose deaths in the past 10 days. We're perpetuating it until people die anyway. We've lost 56,000 people to overdoses in this country in under 10 years. That's entirely too many people. It's going in the wrong direction.

We do not agree with that conversation.

What we do agree with is that people can and do recover. Everybody in this room agrees that we can recover. Let's start walking a path for that in Canada. This is the first step. Bill C-240 has the first step with incarceration. It has to go further—I recognize that. This is the first piece. We have to start focusing on recovery nationwide, not palliative care.

Blake Richards: Can I turn to you, Mr. St. Amand?

You mentioned a couple of different pieces in your opening remarks that are critically important for this bill.

The first thing you touched on is how critical it is that inmates leave prison truly prepared for life on the outside so that they're not falling back into a life of crime. Rather than simply checking boxes to get towards statutory release, it's about making sure they're fully prepared for walking out of prison so that they don't reoffend.

You also talked about the devastation we see from drugs like fentanyl, as well as about the need for stronger sentencing for those who are profiting from large-scale trafficking. I know your point was taken that we need to make sure it's targeted at the right individuals.

I wonder if you could speak to why that combination is so important. Why is it so important that we crack down on those who are profiting from the trafficking of drugs, while also ensuring that we're giving people the treatment they need so they can get out of this cycle of being trapped in addiction? Why is that combination so important?

Spencer St. Amand: Any combination of long sentencing versus.... Again, we're in Canada. Eventually, they're going to be released. If we are not pairing long sentences—because there have to be consequences to actions—with rehabilitation.... It matters so that they won't. Even if they are serving 10 or 20 years, they're going to get out. We don't want them to do it again. If you're not setting them up for success, it's just repeating the cycle.

We really need to make sure there are opportunities so that when we have eventual release—for everybody who commits a crime, an eventual option is eligibility to be released—they are successful. We need to give them opportunities to be successful. If not, what's the point? We might as well keep them in prison.

Blake Richards: That's fair enough.

What do I have for time?

● (1150)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Blake Richards: Okay. Well, I'll have to make this quick.

Ms. DeRidder, this is a similar question.

We've seen, over the last decade, the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for serious drug offences. We've seen the weakening of the bail system by the Liberal government.

Can you speak to why it's so important that your bill helps to reverse the damage those policies have done, in terms of real accountability?

Kelly DeRidder: Very simply, it's to break cycles.

I think we're out of time.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Richards.

[*Translation*]

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

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today and for their inspiring testimony. They're all very brave, and I commend them for what they've done. I have great respect for that.

What you are contributing today is very important, Mrs. DeRidder. For a while now, we on the committee have been studying parole and the effect of support during parole on the recidivism rate. Frankly, it is very clear that support matters. People who are released without support are the ones who have the highest recidivism rate. You've made some further points about that.

In your bill, you specifically mention fentanyl. Why?

Would you be open to your bill covering more substances?

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: In the bill, I focused on fentanyl, because this is the most devastating drug we've ever seen. It's literally destroying brains instantaneously. We have to get this off the street.

That being said, of course I'm open to looking at other substances. Any substance on our street is not okay. The traffickers need to be held accountable for preying on vulnerability, because at the end of the day, that's what they're doing.

Yes, I am definitely open to looking at other substances, but fentanyl is devastating. It's instantaneously devastating.

[*Translation*]

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you for the explanation.

Mr. Brazeau, in your opening remarks, you mentioned programs. As you said it in English, I will repeat it in English. You were talking about programs

[*English*]

that are culturally appropriate and gender-based.

[*Translation*]

Can you tell us more about what that means and how important it is that programs meet those criteria?

Senator Patrick Brazeau: Thank you for the question.

In my case, I'm thinking specifically of first nations and other indigenous people, who suffer a lot from substance abuse, mainly because of the generational effects of residential schools. Programs that have been tried in the correctional system have always evolved, because they did not necessarily take into account first nations culture. These were not programs created specifically for them to help them succeed.

The bill needs to keep up that pace so that first nations and other indigenous people have programs that work for them and not programs that work for other people.

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you, Senator.

My colleague Jacques Ramsay wanted to ask a question.

Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.): My question is for Mrs. DeRidder. I'm just looking for clarification.

You suggest an amendment to the Criminal Code, and you direct some of your recommendations to the Correctional Service of Canada. However, in terms of the powers you want to give the courts, you don't specify the type of prison sentence. Does it refer to sentences of two years or more or sentences of two years or less?

Is it all sentences, including those imposed on offenders who go to a provincial institution?

We know that it is hard to provide treatment to people who cycle in and out of prison.

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: In no way through this bill do I want to impede on provincial jurisdiction. This bill will apply to federal institutions, where it is two years plus, but I'm hoping that the provinces take our lead on this and implement it in the provincial jurisdiction as well.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

Jacques Ramsay: I have another question.

[*English*]

You mentioned that it's important to move away from harm reduction and abstinence. Certainly abstinence works. There's no doubt about this. At the same time, you mentioned that the government is sometimes in favour of harm reduction. We could add that the scientific community as a whole and the medical community also believe in harm reduction.

Based on this, and on the need to move away from this debate, would you be open to some amendments to some of the assumptions in your preamble?

Kelly DeRidder: Absolutely. The preamble doesn't make it into the legislation anyway, so sure.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. DeRidder, in your bill, you want to amend the Criminal Code so that trafficking a large quantity of fentanyl becomes an aggravating factor. Are you leaving it up to the judge to define what a large quantity of fentanyl is? It's a bit ambiguous.

What definition did you have in mind?

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: I've left it open right now for debate and to speak to the experts about what the definition of “large scale” will end up being. There needs to be a definition here, but we have to be very careful, because fentanyl kills people in amounts the size of a pencil lead. That amount can kill people, so when we're talking about fentanyl, what is a “large scale”?

Right now, it's open to amendments and to listening to the experts. Let's have a debate on it, and then let's define it before it makes it to the Senate.

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you.

Mr. St. Amand, you have the last word.

What message would you like us to take away from your testimony today?

[*English*]

Spencer St. Amand: Kelly's really on to something. Something needs to change.

In all of this, we're willing to put sides aside and focus on what's important. That's people's lives, making some real change and using programs, such as the one I'm building, Key Metrix and Direct Your Life, that come from the lived experience of people whose voices need to be heard and who have walked this life and understand it and who aren't just sitting in an office somewhere making changes and hoping for the best. People can be successful. Look at this panel. We are here to testify today that people can change.

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille: We hope, Mr. St. Amand, that your message will be heard. The main challenge I see with this bill is the lack of financial resources dedicated to its implementation. We hope your message will be heard, because I strongly believe in social reintegration and rehabilitation.

Thank you very much for coming.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. Lloyd, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

I'll start with MP DeRidder.

There was some concern. Mr. St. Amand was talking about how when we make something an aggravating factor, like the large-scale fentanyl trafficking in this legislation, we have to recognize that there might be people who are in situations in which they're addicted to drugs or they're being exploited. I'm quite confident that we already do that in our justice system. There are mitigating factors and aggravating factors.

Let's say it's a vulnerable young woman who's addicted and is being pressured to traffic fentanyl on a large scale. It could be considered an aggravating factor by a judge, but there would be a lot of mitigating factors as well.

Can you talk about that and address any of the concerns people might have that this could target vulnerable people?

Kelly DeRidder: It is going to target vulnerable people, but in a very good way. She will probably end up being incarcerated because she's trafficking drugs. That's okay. You'll take accountability for decisions that you make, even if you're vulnerable, but while you're there, you can heal from your trauma, because you will be provided the resources you need to heal from whatever it is that's causing your addiction and causing you to live that lifestyle.

Yes, she was vulnerable. Yes, she was taken advantage of. Yes, she made bad decisions. Yes, she can heal from it, recover and live a life on the other side of her incarceration.

● (1200)

Dane Lloyd: I appreciate that, and I agree completely.

An aggravating factor is just a factor in sentencing. It doesn't necessarily mean that it could lead to an increase in the time of sentencing. It could lead to an increase in a period of parole ineligibility. It could lead to an order from the court that the person undergo mandatory rehabilitation. I think those are all important things to assess.

I was wondering if you could tell me—and Senator Brazeau, feel free to chip in as well on this one—how this legislation is an important step forward from the status quo we currently have.

Hon. Patrick Brazeau: It's very simple. You're offering individuals a way out with the proper training that they need. Once they're there, it's very difficult for individuals to admit on their own that they have substance abuse issues, let alone go and seek help. The way this would move beyond the status quo is that people would get the training, and in a generation from now we would see what types of positives we'd done for that community.

Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

One thing that was talked about is the importance of breaking the cycle. It will benefit their children and their children's children when we break the cycle right now.

Madame Gates, you might be the best to talk about this. What is the potential for this legislation to lead a young mother to break the cycle so that we don't have the compounding effects of addiction in society that lead to children, grandchildren and many generations being negatively impacted by those addictions?

Kelly Gates: To speak to my personal experience, it was not only my granddaughter. My son was on drugs for 25 years. He broke the cycle. He was incarcerated many times. He broke the cycle because he moved. He moved from the area. He moved from the people. We don't have enough rehab clinics out there to help people. He went to rehab. He failed. The third time he went to rehab was successful, but he moved from the province. He went from Ontario to Nova Scotia to be successful.

This is all to help federally, young or old. With Kay-Dee being young, in Nova Scotia we were denied by family and children's services: “Nope, send her back to Ontario.” Ontario was a death sentence for her.

To break the cycle, in my experience, you move from the area you're in so that you're not around the same people.

Dane Lloyd: Maybe Mr. St. Amand can—

The Chair: Thank you, MP Lloyd. I'm sorry to interrupt.

MP Housefather, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Ramsay will ask a few questions first.

Jacques Ramsay: I'll go back to Mrs. DeRidder.

[*English*]

In your preamble, you mentioned substance abuse. Do you also think that somewhere in there we should have something about abnormal behaviour, such as gambling and sexual deviancy? These are forms of addiction as well. Do you not want your bill to touch on this at all?

Kelly DeRidder: Any forum to help people break cycles is a positive thing. This bill focuses on recovery and rehabilitation with drugs and breaking the cycle of substance abuse and addiction.

I'm open to preamble changes anyway, because they don't make it into legislation, but the focus is recovery and rehabilitation for substance use.

Jacques Ramsay: If we put it in, it would also involve treatment for sexual deviancy and gambling, which are also important forms of addiction that are ruining the lives of many Canadians right now. That's just a suggestion.

You also mentioned vocational training and the need to acquire professional competence. Can I infer from this that you favour the extension of such programs as CORCAN?

● (1205)

Kelly DeRidder: I'm unaware of that program. Do you want to explain it to me a little?

Jacques Ramsay: CORCAN is a program that favours the acquisition of skills and trades that will allow delinquents, after serving their time, to find a job and be productive in society.

Kelly DeRidder: I'm all for anybody who's willing to partner with institutions or transitional services in order to have people live a full life on the other side of addiction or incarceration. I'm for any company that's willing to hire the previously incarcerated. I'm 100% on board with any program that's willing to educate and give skills training to anybody who deserves a second chance when they come out of incarceration.

Anthony Housefather: First of all, thank you to all of you for being here. Thank you for telling your stories. It's so important to hear those stories and to tie them to actual faces and actual names so that legislators can better legislate.

Ms. DeRidder, you drafted the bill for the courts to make orders. Why did you do that, versus having the courts make recommendations to the CSC and the Parole Board? Why did you draft it as an order, versus leaving flexibility to the Parole Board, for example, to make determinations as to what type of treatment was best, taking into consideration the court's recommendation?

Kelly DeRidder: First off, it's judge-prescribed, not ordered. When it's judge-prescribed, it puts accountability on the institutions to follow through with the measures and for the incarcerated person to take part in those measures. The Parole Board can look at whether the offender has taken part in the rehabilitation plan when making a parole decision.

It's not ordered by a judge; it's prescribed by a judge. The institutions will provide it, and then the Parole Board will look at whether the incarcerated person actually took part in the rehabilitation plan.

Anthony Housefather: That part I do understand. The Parole Board can take everything into consideration, and one of those things should be whether the offender followed through with the treatment. My question, though, would be about a change in circumstances.

This might be the treatment that the judge saw as appropriate at the time of sentencing, but then things can evolve. My understanding is that Correctional Service Canada makes determinations as to the course of treatment while people are in prison. Wouldn't it be better to leave some flexibility to CSC, versus having the judge make a determination at the time of sentencing?

Kelly DeRidder: It's not taking the jurisdiction away from CSC to provide programming beyond what the judge has prescribed at all. They will still have the authority and jurisdiction to do so. That's actually one of the amendments that we worked together on very closely. It will be brought forward by you guys. We have already agreed to make that amendment in the legislation.

Anthony Housefather: That's perfect.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Housefather.

That, unfortunately, concludes the first hour.

As you may have noted, we were very grateful to have you with us today. We want to thank you for all the time and effort you invested in preparing for your presence this morning. We wish you a very good day.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes as we welcome the other witnesses.

● (1205)

(Pause)

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Good afternoon and welcome back.

We will begin the second hour by welcoming the many witnesses who are joining us.

First, from the Correctional Service of Canada, we have Louis Dumulon, health services, and Anne-Marie Labalette, senior deputy commissioner, operations.

From the Department of Justice, we have Joanna Wells, team leader and senior counsel, criminal law policy section, and Amelia Jarvis, counsel, criminal law policy section.

From the Parole Board of Canada, we have Liane Sauer, deputy chairperson, and Monica Irfan, acting director general, policy, planning and operations.

There will be two presentations: one from the Correctional Service of Canada and one from the Parole Board of Canada.

We will start with Anne-Marie Labalette.

You have the floor for five minutes.

● (1215)

Anne-Marie Labalette (Senior Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Correctional Service of Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss private member's Bill C-240, the offender rehabilitation act.

My name is Anne-Marie Labalette. I'm the acting senior deputy commissioner of operations at the Correctional Service of Canada, or CSC. With me is Mr. Dumulon, who is our acting assistant commissioner of health services.

Our mandate, as set out in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, is to keep our communities safe through the safe supervision and rehabilitation of offenders. To do so, CSC provides correctional programs and is recognized as a global leader in the development and delivery of correctional programs.

A range of programs to target multiple risk factors, including those related to substance use, are available in both institutions and the community. We have programs specifically designed for indigenous men, women and offenders. Their intensiveness depends on each person's needs and risk level.

Results show that offenders who have completed the correctional programs offered have higher discretionary release rates and are less likely to be returned to custody.

Pursuant to Bill C-240, CSC is also working to enhance public safety by providing offenders with education programs as well as opportunities to gain the employment skills and experience they need to become law-abiding citizens and productive skilled workers when they return to the community.

Participation in education programs increases employment rates upon release. Research shows that offenders who are employed in the community are less likely to reoffend or be returned to federal custody. This is why employability training is offered at all federal institutions, in addition to CORCAN-run on-the-job training workshops, which are offered at 34 institutions across the country.

Training can lead to offenders getting certificates, which improves their employability by helping them acquire skills that meet the needs of the Canadian labour market. This past fiscal year, many certificates were awarded to offenders in high-demand fields that include construction and agriculture.

As Bill C-240 suggests, substance use and mental health issues are unfortunately common among people admitted to federal custody. Recent year-end data shows that 78% of men and 86% of women admitted to federal custody had a substance use problem.

To address this, CSC provides mental health services to offenders as part of a continuum of care, starting at intake and extending into communities during the release period.

CSC offers people with an addiction a range of evidence-based prevention, treatment, recovery and harm reduction interventions to support rehabilitation, improve health outcomes and reduce overdoses and the transmission of infectious diseases, all with the goal of enhancing public safety.

The bill also proposes that a court may order an offender to write to the victim to acknowledge the harm done as a result of their actions. While offender accountability is important, any communication with a victim must respect the wishes of the victim.

CSC's restorative opportunities program provides victims of crime with the opportunity to safely communicate with the offender who harmed them through directed mediation processes based on restorative justice values and principles. Participation is voluntary for all participants at all stages of the process. Each process is tailored to the people involved and guided by participants' individual needs and expectations. The process is confidential and not intended to influence correctional and parole decisions in favour of the offender.

While the Correctional Service has a statutory responsibility to provide correctional planning and intervention, the courts can and do make recommendations. Those are taken into account by both the Correctional Service and the Parole Board of Canada.

● (1220)

When the Correctional Service of Canada makes recommendations to the Parole Board regarding an offender's conditional release, it considers many factors, including the offender's progress in the correctional interventions set out in their correctional plan. That said, the board is responsible for granting most forms of conditional release.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Labalette.

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

[*English*]

Liane Sauer (Deputy Chairperson, Parole Board of Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Liane Sauer. I'm the deputy chairperson for the Parole Board of Canada, and I'm joined today by my colleague Monica Irfan, who's our interim director general for policy, planning and operations.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee once again, this time regarding your study of Bill C-240, the offender rehabilitation act.

We are here today to explain the Parole Board of Canada's mandate and the legislative and decision-making framework within which board members make conditional release decisions. As part of the criminal justice system, the board contributes to the protection of society by facilitating, as appropriate, the timely and controlled reintegration of offenders into the community as law-abiding citizens. Public safety is always the paramount consideration in all conditional release decisions.

Board members are independent decision-makers who assess each case individually. They determine whether an offender presents an undue risk to society and whether release would contribute to the protection of society by facilitating their reintegration as a law-abiding citizen. In making these decisions, board members use a structured, evidence-based framework and consider all relevant and available information. This can include information from courts, police, victims, offenders, the Correctional Service of Canada, psychological and community assessments, and other relevant sources. Board members assess this information in the context of the statutory criteria for release and the circumstances of the individual case, determining its relevance, reliability and weight.

Rehabilitation and offender accountability are already important considerations in conditional release decision-making. Board members consider information from the sentencing process, progress against an offender's correctional plan, institutional behaviour, participation and progress in programming and treatment, and other information relevant to risk and reintegration. This allows members to assess an offender's efforts to address identified risk factors, engage in correctional programming and prepare for safe reintegration into the community.

Bill C-240 would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to expressly identify an offender's progress with respect to measures prescribed by the court as information to be considered in conditional release decision-making. The board already considers this information under the existing legislative and policy framework, including information from the sentencing process and information concerning an offender's participation and progress in programming treatment and other correctional interventions.

Bill C-240 would therefore make explicit in legislation a consideration that is already part of the board's decision-making. The information outlined in the bill would not, on its own, determine the outcome of a parole decision. Public safety would remain the paramount consideration, and board members would continue to assess each case independently, applying legislated criteria and considering the relevance, reliability and weight of all available information as part of a comprehensive assessment of risk and reintegration potential. If Bill C-240 is enacted, the board would incorporate the new legislative requirements into its decision-making framework and operational processes.

In closing, the board's focus remains the protection of society through fair, impartial and evidence-based decision-making.

Thank you. We would be pleased to answer your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sauer.

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

[*English*]

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming today and sharing your perspectives.

My question is for Madame Labalette.

When I meet with correctional officers across this country, a lot of times they tell me that they see inmates coming in who don't have a drug problem, but when they get released back into the community, they're addicts. They're raising concerns and alarm bells. We heard a story recently in which, in a maximum security prison, drones were flying in food from McDonald's, booze, drugs and weapons.

Can you speak about that? How are these failures happening in our facilities?

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

Anne-Marie Labalette: Thank you for the question.

The safety of institutions and offenders in institutions remains the primary concern. Drones are a reality today, as you mentioned. That's why we're addressing the issue. In the last spring economic update, we received new funding related to the challenges that drones pose to us. We will be able to conduct pilot projects and improve our technologies, which will help limit drones' access for delivering things like drugs, as you said. At the same time, we are also making sure to improve our infrastructure to limit drone access. For example, we're adding physical measures that prevent drones from coming in. This is ongoing work that we need to keep doing.

In terms of drug use in institutions, we offer offenders a number of interventions and programs, including health programs, to make their process the best it can be while they are incarcerated.

[*English*]

Arpan Khanna: What do you think is the best treatment type or option for those who are struggling in prison with these types of challenges? Is it medical treatment? What kinds of programs exist right now that would help them get off the drugs, and which ones do you think have been most successful in the prisons?

[*Translation*]

Anne-Marie Labalette: I can start answering and then give the floor to my colleague Mr. Dumulon.

I think it's a comprehensive approach. There is no technique that will eliminate all the risks on an ongoing basis. Each offender has different needs. Correctional programs are part of the response to that, and our infrastructure, which is designed to limit what comes into the institution and access to drugs, is also part of the solution to help offenders move forward.

Next, we have health programs to address offenders' mental health or substance use issues. A range of measures are available to offenders to find the best approach to meet their needs, depending on their future risk level.

[*English*]

Arpan Khanna: I appreciate that, because drugs are flowing into our prisons; it's happening. It's not even being denied anymore.

I have another concern. You may have heard that Correctional Service Canada was offering plastic straws to inmates for safer snorting. Has this program been put on pause?

[*Translation*]

Louis Dumulon (Acting Assistant Commissioner, Health Services, Correctional Service of Canada): The expansion of the harm reduction measures we wanted to implement has been put on hold. In fact, we decided to pause after discussions with our union partners, employees and other partners outside the institutions. We wanted to conduct further consultations and have more discussions to determine the next steps and the way forward, and to identify the best approach to expanding harm reduction measures. It's also important to mention that this is only one part of the overall set of measures we're putting in place to ensure that drugs have less of an impact in our institutions.

[*English*]

Arpan Khanna: The existing concern is that the minister says it has been paused. It hasn't been cancelled. Is that correct? Is it still being consulted on, as you said? Is it still possible for it to be reintroduced into our prisons?

[*Translation*]

Louis Dumulon: For now, we don't know what the next steps will be. It's really only after consulting and discussing things with our various partners that we'll be able to determine the way forward.

[*English*]

Arpan Khanna: Thank you for that.

The concern also exists when it comes to parole. There have been numerous highlights in the media showing that convicted killers and child rapists are being released to attend law school classes and cooking classes.

Can you comment on that, Madame Sauer?

Liane Sauer: I can't speak to individual cases, but I can share with you that Canada has one of the highest parole success rates in the world, and that over the last five years, 99.8% of federal day parole and 99.3% of federal full parole supervision periods were completed without violent reoffending. Those facts are very strong.

● (1230)

Arpan Khanna: Are victims and their families consulted when these folks are released back into the communities?

Liane Sauer: The Parole Board upholds the victims' rights to participation, information and protection. They have a role to play in our conditional release process. They can participate in whichever manner they choose, whether in person or through a written statement or a video, so they do have an opportunity to share with board members the impact the offence had on them.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Khanna. Welcome to the committee.

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

[*English*]

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

Thank you to the officials for appearing today.

My questions will focus on how Bill C-240 builds on the importance of giving offenders a second chance to reintegrate into society by focusing on prevention after release, giving the offenders the support they need, providing support to the correctional system and addressing potential gaps in the current framework.

During the first hour of today's meeting, we heard considerable discussion about rehabilitation and successful reintegration. Also, we heard that CSC should offer programming that is culturally appropriate and gender-specific.

To the CSC officials, could you elaborate on whether CSC makes such considerations and how culturally relevant programming is provided to offenders?

[*Translation*]

Anne-Marie Labalette: Yes, I can confirm that we offer programs tailored to the needs of offenders to help them reintegrate into society. We have programs specifically geared towards women, for example, as well as programs for indigenous offenders. So our program offerings are quite varied, and we want to meet the needs of each offender. We offer programs both in institutions and in the community, once offenders are released, to ensure that support and interventions continue throughout their reintegration into society.

[*English*]

Sima Acan: Thank you so much.

Mr. Dumulon, health care inside institutions covers a wide range of needs, from medication management and chronic disease care to mental health services and a transition back to community providers upon release.

Which of these areas do you see as best positioned to benefit from Bill C-240? What about the bill's provisions supports the delivery of care that CSC already provides well?

[*Translation*]

Louis Dumulon: Interventions take place at different stages, whether within the institutions or during the transition and community-based support. It's a chain, and every link is important. If one link is missing, it doesn't work. So we need to continue working on all fronts to provide inmates with the full range of care they need, whether for mental health or physical health. There must always be connections between experts within the institutions and those in the community to ensure the smoothest possible transition. It's always handled on a case-by-case basis, depending on each individual's treatment plan.

As for the implementation of the bill, I think everything is currently in place to ensure that things can function properly. I didn't really understand the last part of the question about the bill.

The Chair: Unfortunately, I'm going to have to interrupt you, because the bells have started ringing.

[*English*]

Either we can stop immediately or, if there is unanimous consent, we can stay for another 15 minutes. That would leave 15 minutes for us to walk to the House of Commons.

Is there unanimous consent to stay for another 15 minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: In that case, we'll continue with you, Madame Acan.

● (1235)

Sima Acan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dumulon, continuity of care is one of the areas in which clear legislative direction can make a meaningful difference for individuals and for the clinicians who serve them. What aspects of Bill C-240 support continuity of care in a way that reinforces the work done already by health professionals at the Correctional Service of Canada? Why would that matter for both patient outcomes and staff confidence?

[*Translation*]

Louis Dumulon: In terms of treatment, the fact that the bill focuses on rehabilitation certainly adds value. Making sure that people receive the support they need to succeed in life and become contributing members of society is a game changer. From a clinical perspective, putting health, treatment and rehabilitation first is certainly a positive development.

[*English*]

Sima Acan: How does Bill C-240 help the clinicians focus their efforts on the care that matters most? What's the benefit that you really see with Bill C-240?

[*Translation*]

Louis Dumulon: Once again, focusing on treatment and rehabilitation is a positive step. Health professionals have always said that health comes first. Care must be tailored to each individual. Every case is unique, and the bill takes this into account by providing for individualized recommendations. So, putting rehabilitation and health first is a positive thing.

[*English*]

Sima Acan: Thank you so much.

My next question will be for the justice department, with Ms. Wells and Ms. Jarvis.

Courts already consider rehabilitation and recommendations at sentencing. Correctional services and parole boards take those things into account. How does Bill C-240 build on that existing framework? Can you provide an example in which the existing system has effectively balanced rehabilitation and public safety to support successful reintegration outcomes?

The Chair: Answer quickly, please.

Joanna Wells (Team Lead and Senior Counsel, Criminal Law Policy Section, Department of Justice): I will do my best.

The question hits upon an interesting point of the bill. The current framework is that sentencing judges issue recommendations if they have a strong enough evidentiary record on which to base those recommendations for how an offender may serve their sentence, but it's generally not within their area of expertise or their legislative ability. In general, judges issue sentences with recommendations, and it's the legislative responsibility of our federal partners at Correctional Service Canada and the Parole Board to administer that sentence. That is the way the system has worked for a number of years, and it has been determined to be very effective.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Labalette, as a parliamentarian, I received a letter on June 1, 2026, informing me that Correctional Service Canada had decided to discontinue the college program for inmates at Cégep Marie-Victorin. Cégep Marie-Victorin had been providing education to inmates for 53 years. This came as quite a surprise, particularly since, in Quebec, students must complete secondary V to gain access to CEGEP and then to university. In the other provinces, once students have completed grade 12 and obtained their high school diploma, they can go to university.

With your decision to eliminate the program, which cost Correctional Service Canada $200,000 a year, we now have a double standard for incarcerated individuals in Quebec compared with those in the other provinces. You deliberately eliminated Cégep Marie-Victorin's educational program and replaced it with an online service.

Could you tell me whether incarcerated individuals in Quebec currently have access to online college-level training that allows them to earn credits and obtain a diploma at the end of their studies, as they previously could through Cégep Marie-Victorin?

● (1240)

Anne-Marie Labalette: Education will continue to be a priority for the Correctional Service—

Claude DeBellefeuille: Ms. Labalette, I'm asking you a fairly specific question.

You discontinued a service in September 2026. That's very recent. When you did so, you told the people at Cégep Marie-Victorin that, after 53 years of partnership, you would offer online training, train more people and ensure that they would obtain their diplomas more quickly online.

At this point, do inmates in Quebec have access to online college-level studies, as you said they would when you terminated your contract?

Anne-Marie Labalette: We are currently in discussions with representatives of Cégep Marie-Victorin, among others, as well as representatives of other CEGEPs to offer services across the province, which wasn't the case before.

Claude DeBellefeuille: You're telling me that you ended a training program that had been running for 53 years without ensuring that something else would be offered.

I'll ask you my question again, which is straightforward: Are there people incarcerated in Quebec who previously had access to college-level education at Cégep Marie-Victorin but who no longer have access to it because you haven't completed the transition to your new model?

It's not a very complicated question.

Anne-Marie Labalette: I can confirm that we are still in discussions with representatives of Cégep Marie-Victorin and other CEGEPs.

Claude DeBellefeuille: So what you're telling me is that you withdrew $200,000 from Cégep Marie-Victorin and that there was no transition to a new model. There are people in prisons right now who can't attend CEGEP or any other educational institution. This concerns me greatly because I read the devastating report by the correctional investigator about six years ago, which said that access to training, education and a high school diploma, known in Quebec as secondary V, in Correctional Service Canada institutions was deteriorating. He expressed some frustration, pointing out that prison schools relied primarily on paper and pens, that textbooks were outdated and that libraries lacked resources. I also know that the former commissioner closed libraries.

We know that 6% of the prison population works in CORCAN's prison industries. That's not very many. Has that percentage increased over the past six years? I'd like you to tell me. We also know that the number of offenders on waiting lists for educational and work programs is very high and that waiting periods can be very long. This was pointed out by the correctional investigator six years ago, following an extensive study on learning behind bars. In his latest report, published last October, he says that problems persist with the training and support provided to inmates to help them reintegrate after serving their sentences, so that they're better equipped to find employment, either because they've obtained a diploma or because they've acquired skills in a particular trade.

Do you think the bill we're studying will compel Correctional Service Canada to take this seriously, invest more in education and modernize its approach so that inmates, when they finish serving their sentences, are better equipped to take on the kinds of jobs available today?

Anne-Marie Labalette: The mandate of CORCAN, which is our team responsible for employment and employability, is precisely that: to train offenders so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the Canadian economy once they're reintegrated into society, whether upon release or at the end of their sentence. We provide training—

Claude DeBellefeuille: I'd like you to confirm something. Six years ago, the investigator said that only 6% of the inmate population worked in CORCAN's prison industries. Has the percentage increased in the past six years?

Anne-Marie Labalette: It has increased, but unfortunately, I don't have the exact figures at hand. We could provide them if you'd like.

CORCAN's objective is to employ more offenders or give them access to vocational training programs so they can continue along their path. CORCAN offers a great deal of training in areas such as construction, where the needs in the community are particularly pressing—

Claude DeBellefeuille: However, does it lead to certification? You know that the construction industry requires certification—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

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

[*English*]

Blake Richards: Thanks.

My first question will be for our justice department officials. It's related to fentanyl, which is touched on in this bill. I want to make it really clear, for anyone listening, how important this fentanyl aspect is.

If anyone has seen these people walking around hunched over—permanently hunched over in many cases—fentanyl has caused that. This is far from the worst thing it causes. Fentanyl kills people. It's that simple. I would argue, it does this so much that those who are the traffickers behind this drug are engaging in murder, essentially, because they know that, at some point, fentanyl is going to kill someone.

My first question for our justice department officials is related to large-scale fentanyl trafficking. Can you confirm for me whether that is currently listed explicitly as an aggravating factor in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act?

● (1245)

Joanna Wells: Thank you for the question.

I can confirm that it's not explicitly listed, but it is considered by the courts. You may be aware of the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in 2021 of R v. Parranto, which confirmed that the starting point or the range of sentences for—they call it wholesale fentanyl trafficking—was, I believe, between eight and 15 years in prison. They do take it quite seriously, and they impose significant sentences.

Blake Richards: Clearly, it's not having the impact it needs to have, currently. This stuff is deadly. We have to do more about it, for sure. Bill C-240 is trying to do just that.

Can you speak to how Bill C-240 ensures that this will be put into law and that it will lead to stronger and more consistent sentences?

Joanna Wells: To clarify, are you interested specifically in the aggravating factor part of Bill C-240 or the entirety?

Blake Richards: Well, it is specifically, but you can speak to the entirety of its impact on these fentanyl traffickers.

Joanna Wells: I can do that. Thank you.

To step back, as this is a private member's bill, the Department of Justice isn't able to speak to the underlying objectives except for what we have heard from the sponsor and other witnesses. From our perspective, we see the bill as having three main elements. One of them is a novel sentencing tool that would allow judges to order specific treatments and specific—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Unfortunately, Ms. Wells, I have to interrupt you.

Dr. Powlowski, please go ahead for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): This bill gives what I think judges already have—the power to make recommendations. They don't have the power to impose treatment. It seems that the person who's behind the bill is willing to consider making it just recommendations rather than imposing treatment.

I wonder what the panellists think about the judge getting involved in terms of making decisions about the nature of rehabilitation. It seems to me that the judge is there in order to determine guilt and determine sentencing. In terms of what exactly the best intervention is for this particular person so that they don't reoffend, is that the job of the judge? Is it appropriately the job of the judge? Whose job is that?

We have three groups here who are dealing with this issue. I don't know who wants to start or who has any ideas about that.

Joanna Wells: I think I've been nominated to at least start off.

I can confirm that the current state of the law is that judges order sentences. They may make recommendations about certain programs that they think, based on the evidentiary record, could be useful, but they do not have the power to bind anybody to those. The offender is then sent over to CSC, and Correctional Service Canada will be able to speak to that. They do a more specific intake. They assess the availability of programming and the needs of the specific offender before them.

That is the current structure. The bill would propose something slightly different and slightly more prescriptive on behalf of the judge, which I think you have alluded to.

[*Translation*]

Anne-Marie Labalette: I'd add that, at present, we do have the legal framework to assess offenders, identify their needs and determine the level of risk they pose, in order to support their reintegration into society while they're serving their sentence. That's really our mandate.

As part of the assessment, we take into account the risks associated with substance use and the type of offender to ensure that we provide them with the appropriate tools and framework to support their reintegration into society and, ultimately, ensure public safety.

● (1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Unfortunately, that's all the time we have.

On behalf of all the members of the committee, I'd like to thank you for your testimony, for the time you've given us and for all the work you've done to prepare for this meeting.

[*English*]

Before we adjourn, I want to flag a couple of things about the agenda. I know a couple of people may be interested in this.

Next Wednesday, we will have Bill C-263. Next Monday, we will have Bill C-263 again. In both cases, we will have witnesses.

On the following Wednesday, November 25, we're going to come back to Bill C-236 for clause-by-clause work. Amendments need to be submitted by November 20.

On the following Monday, November 30, the Minister of Public Safety is planning to attend this committee for the supplementary estimates.

On the following Wednesday, December 2, we will turn to clause-by-clause work on Bill C-263.

During the last sitting week, we'll meet on December 7 and December 9. We'll do the first meeting on Bill C-240 on the Monday with witnesses. On the following Wednesday, it will be Bill C-240 again, but with clause-by-clause work.

Having said that, I say have a great day.

Thank you.

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