

October 15, 2013

Honourable Peter MacKay
Minister of Justice/ Attorney General of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister MacKay,

On behalf of the eleven national professional health organizations supporting this letter, we first would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on assuming the role of Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. This position and its responsibilities have implications for all Canadians. We look forward to supporting your work in developing sound, evidenced-based legislation that will serve to both protect the public and support victims of crime while balancing efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders into our communities.

It is in this spirit of support and collaboration that we write to express our deep concern with aspects of Bill C-54, the Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act, as currently drafted. With the recent announcement of the prorogation of the Parliament of Canada, it is our understanding that it is within your purview to either choose to re-introduce the legislation as drafted or to hold off its re-introduction in order to consider amendments that will deeply broaden support from all stakeholders.

As strong partners, advocates and national leaders in mental health, we are well aware and appreciative of your work with our Canadian Forces in tackling the stigma of mental health. Under your leadership, the Canadian Forces *Road to Mental Readiness* program has provided not only practical tools to build resilience and recovery into the daily lives of our military personnel and their families; it has provided a pathway to deeply reduce the stigma of mental illness within the Forces.

We trust that you will apply the same passion and understanding of mental illness to your new role by taking the opportunity to listen openly to the valid concerns of those opposing aspects of Bill C-54 in order to provide the Parliament of Canada with a balanced bill next session that supports the rights of victims without unnecessarily perpetuating the stigma of mental health and illness.

From our perspective and that of many victim rights advocates, the proposed changes to *Not Criminally Responsible* provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada, currently in Bill C-54, will create barriers to treatment and recovery, as well as stretch the forensic mental health system with little expected net benefit for victims or society in general. As well, the argument has been made that some perpetrators might decide to evade the NCR route in order to serve less time and be released without treatment.

Consequently, we urge you to take this opportunity to work with the mental health community to amend Bill C-54 to better support victims without restricting the ability of people found not criminally responsible to meet the societal goals of recovery and, at the right time, reintegration with appropriate care and supports.

Alternatively, if you choose not to re-introduce Bill C-54 as drafted next session, you have our commitment to publicly support your choice in this regard.

Please consider this letter as an open invitation to meet with us, at your earliest convenience, to discuss our concerns and help support you in moving forward with legislation that provides support for victims while keeping Canada moving forward in its efforts to address and de-stigmatize mental illness.

Please contact the team facilitator, Chris Summerville, at 1.204.786.1616 or chris@schizophrenia.ca to schedule the meeting.

Kindest regards,



Mood Disorders Society of Canada
Société pour les troubles de l'humeur du Canada



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SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF CANADA
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.

(Representing all Schizophrenia Societies across Canada)



Canadian Psychiatric Association



Association des psychiatres du Canada



CASP/ACPS 2
Canadian Association For Suicide Prevention
Association canadienne pour la prévention du suicide