



Association québécoise
Plaidoyer-Victimes

Montreal, June 3, 2019

Subject: Letter to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in relation to its study of Bill C-337

On behalf of the Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes, I would first like to thank all Honourable Senators for the work they did during this Parliament to enable the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to continue the study of Bill C-337, An Act to Amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code (sexual assault).

When this bill was introduced in 2017, it had the full support of all the political parties in the House of Commons. On May 28, 2019, the Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes joined other partners in signing a letter to remind parliamentarians of the importance of this bill.

We support the changes proposed by the Honourable Senator André Pratte because we believe that they will enhance some of the provisions of this bill.

We support the first amendment, which recommends that, after they are appointed, federal judges must commit to participating in sexual assault law training. This would make it easier to implement training programs and eliminate unnecessary costs to society.

We also support the second amendment because it gives those responsible for developing the training for federal judges more latitude to conduct consultations with individuals and organizations that they believe could help with the development of these programs.

The third amendment responds to the concerns of many organizations, including our own, regarding the importance of passing a law that will not infringe on the independence of Canadian judges.

Despite the amendments that have been made to the Criminal Code since the early 1980s and despite our efforts to implement measures to make it easier for victims of sexual assault to navigate the criminal justice system, these victims are still facing many obstacles. Those obstacles have been documented in various studies conducted across the country in recent years and in many reports stemming from consultations conducted by the

federal, provincial and territorial governments in Quebec and other parts of Canada. They were also apparent in the implementation of sexual violence action plans.

Many survivors gave powerful testimony at a conference organized by L'R des Centres de femmes du Québec in May. Their experience with the justice system was not only fraught with difficulty, but it also revictimized them. Many of those who participated in the conference said that, if they had to do it all over again, they would not report the crime that was committed against them. That is horrendous.

However, it is something we have heard all too often. Clearly, victims lack confidence in the justice system. We have a duty to do things differently and to improve our practices so that victims of sexual assault feel as though they are being treated with respect and dignity when they turn to the justice system for help. That is the very basis of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, which was adopted in 2015.

Bill C-337 sends a very important message, even if it does not respond to all the problems that need to be solved in order to give victims of sexual assault better access to justice and more confidence in our justice institutions.

We hope that this bill will be passed during this Parliament and we thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,



Arlène Gaudreault

President