



QUAKERS
Canadian Friends
Service Committee

60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, ON M5R 1C7
QuakerService.ca
(416) 920-5213
Info@QuakerService.ca

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Hon. Gary Anandasangaree
Minister of Public Safety Canada

Hon. Sean Fraser
Minister of Justice

Dear Ministers,

Greetings from Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada. We are writing to you today with deep apprehensions about calls for parole reform coming from various police sectors and to convey our concern regarding the broad trend of recent legislative changes that are moving Canadian criminal and prison law into harsher practices.

You may already be aware that, as explained by the Correctional Service of Canada's corporate information, it was Quakers in Philadelphia who introduced the framework for the penitentiary system as we know it today. It was developed in the hope of reforming a system that was deeply harmful to people. As a faith community that was used to silence, and found solace in it, Quakers saw giving people time to reflect in solitude as far better than dungeons, execution, or physical torture. It is a legacy through experience that makes Quakers active in prison reform and abolition movements today.

Quakers have long believed people can change and rehabilitate. They have campaigned for prisoner education and job training, improved prison conditions, and parole systems—viewing these as both humane and conducive to reform. In Canada, Quakers continue to participate in the Alternative to Violence Project (AVP), an interactive methodology that helps to build multiple skills among those who are incarcerated and has shown promising results in reducing recidivism (<https://avp.international/literature>). CFSC promotes responses to crime that actively prevent harm, repair harm, and move beyond harm. We do this in ways that balance the needs of all parties and are concerned for *society as a whole*.

As such, when it was brought to our attention that in July two police associations called on the government to make changes to existing parole law in Canada, we became concerned. The Canadian parole system is already profoundly punitive, creating an uphill battle for people who are working hard to gain release and rebuild their lives post-incarceration.

The Canadian Police Association has asked the government to apply to parole the same approach that it used for bail and sentencing reform. That approach produced Bill C-14, a bill which reformed more than eighty clauses across four statutes, and included sentencing changes, restrictions on conditional sentences, and amendments to the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

We join a growing number of people in Canada who are deeply concerned that Parliament's agenda is being set to the specifications of certain lobby groups, on a timetable that leaves no room for scrutiny, and in the absence of any evidence that such supposedly "tough on crime" agendas work to keep us safe.

The Prime Minister's mandate letter of 21 May 2025 commits this government to "uphold the rule of law, protect our democratic institutions, and reinforce the unity of our country." The same letter sets out seven priorities for this Parliament. Changes to criminal law are not among them and were not anticipated as priorities for public safety.

The mandate letter certainly focused on 'results over spending' and cost efficiencies in government operations. Systems that prioritize punishment and vengeance not only harm our society, but they also cost us billions of taxpayer dollars that could be much better spent elsewhere. One case in point is the relative costs of incarceration versus community care. Holding one person in federal custody costs approximately \$156,700 a year in a men's prison, or about \$256,700 in a prison designated for women. Meanwhile, supervising one person in the community only costs about \$47,500 and does not negatively impact public safety. This is a striking difference.

The mandate letter also commits the government to "advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples." Indigenous women and gender-diverse people make up more than half of the people held in federal prisons designated for women, and Indigenous men are also incarcerated at devastating rates. Making intelligent and concerted efforts to change this reality would be "advancing reconciliation." Instead, every crime policy advanced by this government has ignored the very real problems the Canadian prison system faces, and each has moved us into a harsher, more punitive system. As Quakers, we feel led to advocate against such a direction, and towards actual gestures of reconciliation.

Lastly, we at CFSC are very concerned about how the needs of people who have been victimized by crime are being presented as the driving force for these changes. Making the Canadian prison system more dysfunctional in the name of victims of crime, and assuming all victims of crime want a more retributive justice system, is unfair. Victims of crime are not a homogenous group, but a diverse demographic who hold a breadth of ideas, needs, and perspectives that deserve to be respected.

We do not support putting changes to parole law on Parliament's agenda this fall, and strongly encourage that your departments strengthen, rather than dismantle, Canada's commitments to fair and just institutions.

Please write back and tell me what position you will take.

Yours sincerely,
Sandra Wiens

Government Relations Representative
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

CC: Frank Caputo, Arpan Khanna, Jenny Kwan, Claude DeBelleFeuille, Rhéal Éloi Fortin, Elizabeth May