

Measuring Productive Justice Policies

How Can We Assess Policy, Legislation, and Ideas about Justice?

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From time to time, public conversations about justice emerge in the press or are generated by governments, the educational community, or communities at large. Such conversations represent important opportunities for Friends to respond to justice-related issues, educate their communities, inform the debate and create responses worthy of sharing. Sometimes, people wish to compose letters to legislators or policy-makers. Monthly Meetings may wish to draft Minutes of concern.

Our responses need to be thoughtful, informed, based upon solid research and, thereby, trustworthy. They must speak to fundamental concerns that Friends have raised over the years and remain in keeping with Friends' previous statements, testimonies and Minutes.

Quakers Fostering Justice (QFJ), a program committee of the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), in keeping with Friends' testimonies and advices concerning peace, justice and equality, holds as its long-term goal the fostering of a way of life that is both just and compassionate. This includes creatively sharing our understanding that while harm and conflict will continue to be a part of the fabric of human experience, when hurt we should not respond with punishment or prisons.

We also believe that energy and resources should be spent on activities that will improve the lives of Canadians, through the social services, education, health, as well as legal and correctional systems in Canada. The goal should clearly be to increase public safety and reduce harm, while serving the needs of people who have been affected by crime.

Questions to assist in the analysis of proposed projects, policies or legislative responses to crime include:

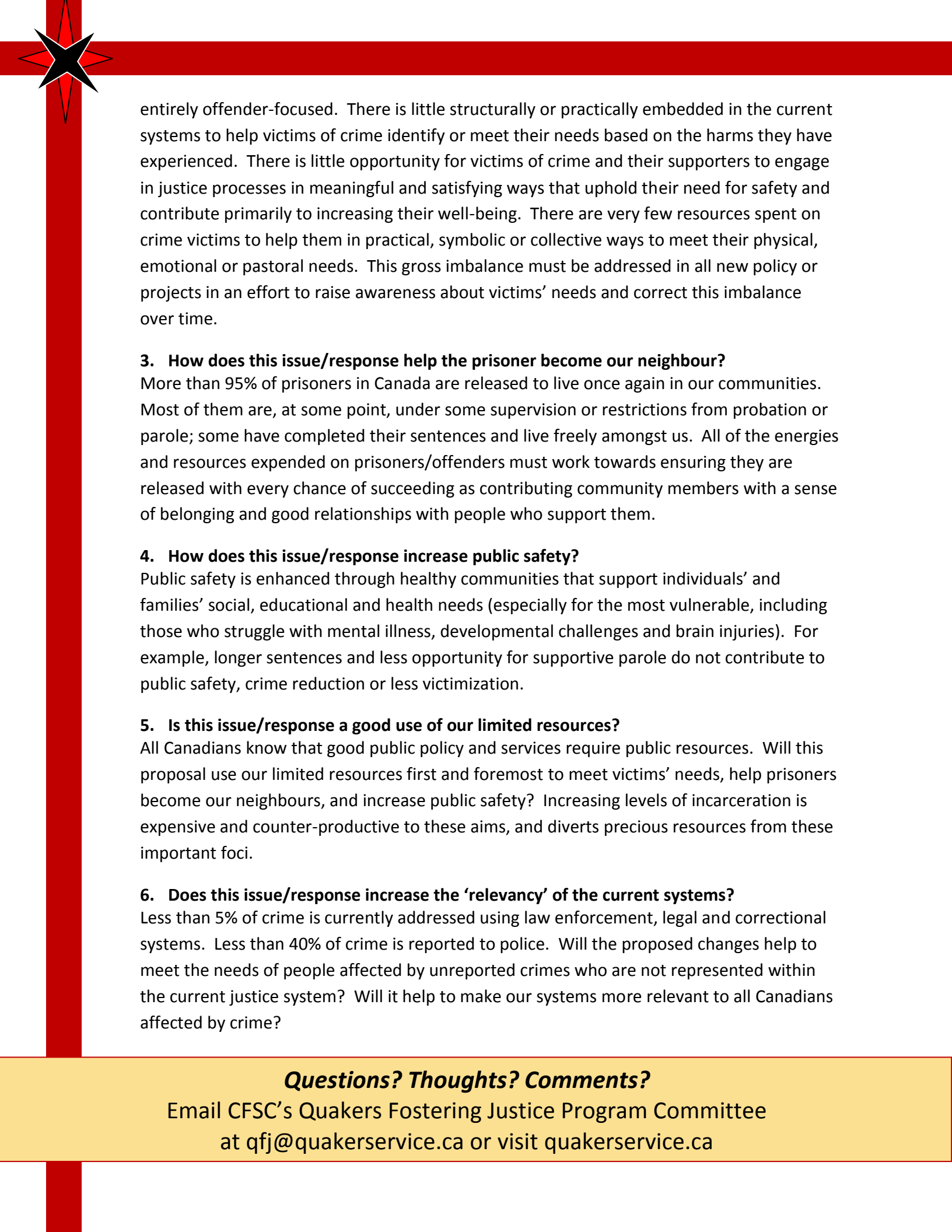
1. How does this issue/response reflect Friends' understanding of That of God's in all people?

First, and foremost, we are a Religious Society that believes in the sacredness of Creation. All of our analyses must be in keeping with our testimonies of equality, peace, simplicity, community and integrity.

2. How will this issue/response meet the needs of those most affected by crime – the victims?

The legal and correctional systems in Canada are almost





entirely offender-focused. There is little structurally or practically embedded in the current systems to help victims of crime identify or meet their needs based on the harms they have experienced. There is little opportunity for victims of crime and their supporters to engage in justice processes in meaningful and satisfying ways that uphold their need for safety and contribute primarily to increasing their well-being. There are very few resources spent on crime victims to help them in practical, symbolic or collective ways to meet their physical, emotional or pastoral needs. This gross imbalance must be addressed in all new policy or projects in an effort to raise awareness about victims' needs and correct this imbalance over time.

3. How does this issue/response help the prisoner become our neighbour?

More than 95% of prisoners in Canada are released to live once again in our communities. Most of them are, at some point, under some supervision or restrictions from probation or parole; some have completed their sentences and live freely amongst us. All of the energies and resources expended on prisoners/offenders must work towards ensuring they are released with every chance of succeeding as contributing community members with a sense of belonging and good relationships with people who support them.

4. How does this issue/response increase public safety?

Public safety is enhanced through healthy communities that support individuals' and families' social, educational and health needs (especially for the most vulnerable, including those who struggle with mental illness, developmental challenges and brain injuries). For example, longer sentences and less opportunity for supportive parole do not contribute to public safety, crime reduction or less victimization.

5. Is this issue/response a good use of our limited resources?

All Canadians know that good public policy and services require public resources. Will this proposal use our limited resources first and foremost to meet victims' needs, help prisoners become our neighbours, and increase public safety? Increasing levels of incarceration is expensive and counter-productive to these aims, and diverts precious resources from these important foci.

6. Does this issue/response increase the 'relevancy' of the current systems?

Less than 5% of crime is currently addressed using law enforcement, legal and correctional systems. Less than 40% of crime is reported to police. Will the proposed changes help to meet the needs of people affected by unreported crimes who are not represented within the current justice system? Will it help to make our systems more relevant to all Canadians affected by crime?

Questions? Thoughts? Comments?

Email CFSC's Quakers Fostering Justice Program Committee
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