

*Government Orders*

Provisions I am going to describe add up to the first formal recognition of victims as legitimate and real players in the parole system's decision-making process.

I want to say that I am very pleased to bring forward these provisions. Currently if the victim of a crime writes to me or to the board and asks that a victim impact statement be put before the board, I cannot guarantee that is going to be done. Statements are considered a matter of policy only.

If the request is to attend the Parole Board hearing, the inmate has the right of veto. If the request is to find out when or where or under what circumstances and conditions an inmate will be released, the Privacy Act will frequently prevent a disclosure.

Under part II of the bill these provisions will be changed. In future, the National Parole Board panel that is hearing a case will determine who may attend. The inmate will be consulted but will not have a veto. With the passage of the bill, victims will be entitled to have their statements become part of the inmate file on which the hearing will be based.

Currently, very little information can be released even to victims who want to know if an offender is likely to be released. We are unable because of the Privacy Act even to assure a victim that the offender will not be released, which is frequently the case.

Under this bill, if a victim contacts the board or CSC and asks to be kept informed, he or she can be informed of the release eligibility date, the hearing date, the offender's destination and any conditions imposed. This will apply to temporary absences as well as conditional release decisions.

In addition, the board will maintain a decision register containing information on board decisions and reasons for those decisions. Together, these measures will give victims information about hearings that are relevant to them and contribute to informing the public about parole.

I want to mention one last thing before beginning my concluding remarks and that is the issue of paperwork. Paperwork, whether we like it or not, is at the heart of this very large and sometimes very cumbersome system. With such diverse groups as the courts, the police, parole officers and provincial agencies all working as part of the

criminal justice system, the chance for error can be very real. As we know, they can be deadly.

Everywhere in this bill, the emphasis is on the requirement that accurate and complete information be obtained and exchanged between the various elements of the criminal justice system.

There is a requirement that courts provide reasons for sentencing to the correctional system, and that all information collected by the Correction Service of Canada and the National Parole Board be shared.

This will help to ensure an end to those tragic instances in which a failure to keep files complete has led to escape from custody and even murder.

The changes proposed in this bill also complement others currently under way. As members will know, the prison for women in Kingston is being closed. The process for choosing sites for the regional centres that will replace others is advanced. Other changes are being developed as part of the response to the task force on federally sentenced women. Action is also advanced on many initiatives respecting aboriginal offenders, and correctional programming for them is rapidly expanding.

Certain provisions of this bill will facilitate progress on these files but much is under way already.

As I said earlier, this bill constitutes one part of the program set out in the consultation document *Directions for Reform*. When reinforced by sentencing legislation currently in preparation by the Minister of Justice, we will have reformed the criminal justice system from sentencing through to the end of the penitentiary sentence. This is no small feat and it is an issue that I am sure will go a long way toward restoring sagging public confidence in our criminal justice system.

Finally in closing, let me say that I am anxious to work with members from all sides of the House to have as full and effective a committee process as possible. I know that the justice and solicitor general committee members will be thorough, thoughtful and constructive when considering this bill.

• (1230 )

I have told everyone I have met, including those many groups I have spoken with, that I sincerely want an informed discussion to take place on this bill. I want the best possible product to come forward from this process.