

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Blais that Bill C-126, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Young Offenders Act, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I want to complete my remarks with some of the stories of women who have written to me on this issue. They capture the need for a strong and effective anti-stalking law.

One woman had been stalked for eight years and she said:

Being watched, followed, assaulted, vandalized, robbed, threatened with your life, harassed at school and at work is not romantic. It is a violation of one's rights and freedoms.

She also said:

All the orders in the world could not help, because the police were reluctant to arrest him, and when they did, the judges let him go with very mild sentences.

She had to leave home and go into hiding. She said she was forced to live the existence of a criminal on the run while the real criminal enjoyed freedom. She said:

A person has to be seriously hurt, maimed or killed before anything can be done to get the stalker off the streets—Laws have existed all along. They are not being used to their fullest degree—Even if the accused is a repeat offender, and there is a jail term, they only do half the time—When they do get out, they come out angry. Usually there is a plan for continued or more aggressive harassment.

With the bill before us the problem of lenient sentences remains. Repeat offenders and those who break court orders can still just get probation or one month in jail to be served on weekends.

Our courts do not take assault and sexual assault seriously. Why should they take this criminal harassment law seriously?

In another case a woman left her husband who physically, sexually and emotionally abused her. He threatened to kidnap her daughter. He had access to the daughter. Every time he came over he would threaten to beat up his ex-wife. He phoned her at all hours and said nothing or he threatened her. He told her he would get a gun and blow her head off. He had a court order not to

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contact her. He phoned to threaten her and then he came over. She phoned the police but it took a further phone call and 45 minutes before they arrived. He was charged and found guilty but only given probation. She has since received three death threats in the mail. To this day even hearing the phone ring makes her feel ill.

The Manitoba government made representation before the committee studying the bill. In the five recent stalking cases that it outlined all the harassers broke restraining orders and there was no great penalty for them in doing so. Women have died because of a lack of protection, because of a lack of a strong law, because of an inconsistent enforcement of our current laws, and because of the attitudes in our society that produce these particular men who try to control women. Unfortunately the government has not accepted strong penalties for repeat offenders and those who break restraining orders.

• (1515)

The state of Virginia has a minimum six-year sentence for a third offence of stalking. What I proposed was a minimum six-month sentence for a second offence of stalking which is the same as a second offence penalty for drunk driving.

I am very pleased to support the child witness and anti-child abuse provisions of the bill. I also support a strong and effective anti-stalking bill. I am sorry this bill is not as strong or as clear as I had hoped it would be. We still support the bill. We think that this is one small step forward out of a series of steps that must be taken to eradicate violence against women.

I will conclude by congratulating the real heroes of the day: all those who work in shelters for battered women, who work with abused children, who work in community groups and women's groups to educate the public about these issues. They are the reason we are talking about this today. They deserve our deepest thanks and utmost respect.

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to make a few comments on this piece of legislation and to get the reflections of my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby on it.

A great deal of the impetus for the bill belongs to the hard work of the member for New Westminster—Burnaby. She initiated a private member's bill that was clear and succinct in setting out what was wanted by women across the country. I sent out some information to my riding in a letter outlining the purpose of the bill and