

Government Orders

Resources to help families that have been mainly directed through the Canada Assistance Plan have been curtailed by this government. It has put a ceiling on services under the Canada Assistance Plan in three of the largest provinces, which account for 50 per cent of those in need of child welfare services.

This is how and when we should be putting our resources into working with families on a preventative basis to make sure that youth do not get into trouble with the law later on. If you go into an elementary school, most grade one, two and three teachers will be able to tell you the kids who are going to end up before the juvenile court when they are 12, 13 or 14. They know by their behaviour, by the lack of support they are receiving from their families and by their inability to function in a school environment that these are the kids that are in difficulty.

We choose to ignore that. We do not put in the family support resources that they need. We do not provide adequate income for the families to ensure that these children are not in poverty. We simply wait until the child gets into difficulty. Then we stand and say: "The time has come. We have to teach this kid a lesson. We have to show him that we will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour". Yet we have refused to extend the help and resources that we now know would prevent that child from coming before these courts and becoming a long-term drain on our society.

The overlap of illiteracy and offenders in our adult prison system is well known. We know that 60 per cent to 80 per cent of all adult offenders have a learning disability. Yet we are unprepared to put in resources on a significant basis to deal with this problem in the formative years or even in adult years.

We will not put in place the kinds of programs in our school systems that will ensure youth with disabilities are able to pick up the fundamentals necessary to function in this society: to be able to read at a level so that they can get a job, to be able to handle basic mathematics at a level where they can function in society where they have to understand interest rates, banking and mortgages. We simply are unprepared to put in the kinds of resources. Then four or five years later when this child comes before the youth court we want to say: "It is your fault". We want to make it easier for them to transfer and to say

that the paramount thing must be the protection of society. The best way to protect society is to provide the resources to ensure that this child never gets before juvenile court.

I would support the amendments my colleague has made because I think they maintain the principles we want to see in the Young Offenders Act.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of this report stage debate I felt a need to address the principle lying behind the discussion of this proposed amendment.

The previous member when speaking quite properly raised the issue of public safety. I think we should all make sure that we stop here and take note that hundreds of years ago, perhaps a couple or three hundred years ago, we in western society made a bargain. We made a bargain with the state that in return for public safety, law and order we would give up some of our own personal liberties, liberties like going out and taking care of retribution or the enforcement of revenge after an offence.

We have turned that over to government. We continue, all of us as citizens, to have a right in the *quid pro quo* here to demand from government that it provide the public safety that we bargained for, that the state holds out it is able to provide for us, and that we all pay for it.

Lying behind the Young Offenders Act is a concept that young people who are not fully matured, who have not formed their minds yet in terms of their relationship to society, should be treated differently. I agree with that. I know all my colleagues agree with that.

What has happened is that in the big city—I represent an urban riding—many of my constituents, many people in metropolitan Toronto, are starting to question the artificiality of the distinction between a 17-year-old and 18-year-old. They realize that in many cases we have individuals defined as youths, 17, 16, 15, who have embarked on a pattern of crime that is no different in any material respect from the pattern of crime perpetrated by those who might be 18, 19 or 20 years of age. They justifiably ask the government to which they give their taxes: "Where is the public safety? Where is the system that will provide for safety for me and my family in relation to the assaults, the robberies and the killings?" The proposed amendment to this Young Offenders Act provides a mechanism to address directly, head