

*Criminal Code*

am very pleased that in my own community of Burnaby there is an excellent victim assistance program which has been established by the Burnaby attachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is a new program that began in January of this year. It currently has a complement of dedicated volunteers who provide a variety of services to victims of crime in Burnaby. They file up-to-date information and they explain basic police and court procedures. They accompany people and families to court. They refer to social services and community agencies. They get involved in making people aware of criminal injuries compensation programs, witness appreciation letters, and condolence letters.

I wish to take this opportunity to commend those who are involved in this program, in particular Constable Earla-Kim McColl and Constable Nancy Wilson for the outstanding job that they have done in this important victim assistance program, and to encourage other communities to embark upon similar programs.

I also wish to mention the fact that only one community in twenty-five has a sexual assault crisis centre or a shelter for victims of violence within the home. When we speak of the importance of assisting victims of crime in our society, we must recognize that, to a significant extent, women in our society are still more victimized than men as a result of violent crime. As a society we have to recognize our responsibility to assist those women. Instead, Governments, both the federal Conservative Government and provincial Governments, have cut back on programs to assist women who are victims of violence. For example, I am speaking here of women who have to leave their homes as a result of domestic violence. It is essential that those women have access to emergency and short-term physical shelters for themselves and their children, that they have access to immediate personal counselling, and that they have access to advice.

My colleague, the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse), represents a rural constituency. He has done an outstanding job in bringing to the attention not only of his colleagues in the New Democratic caucus but to Parliament, the particular concerns of women in rural communities. Those women in rural communities are particularly hard hit by the absence of basic support services for situations in which they are victims of family violence.

There is also the concern about those who are victims of sexual assault. Here again the federal Government has cut back on funding for rape crisis centres and sexual assault centres. Instead, funding should be increased for those services to assist women who have suffered the trauma of sexual assault.

We should also be provided funding to assist adults who have been victims of sexual abuse as children. There are a number of groups in Canada pressing the Government to move forward with respect to aid for adult survivors of sexual and other forms of abuse. Yet the Government has turned a deaf ear to their requests.

There have been many reports and studies done on the plight of victims in Canada. As a New Democrat, I am proud that it was the Province of Manitoba, an NDP Government under the leadership of then Attorney General Roland Penner, that moved forward and blazed the trail in Canada for programs for victims of crime. It was the NDP Government in Manitoba that introduced legislation in 1986, a Bill entitled justice for victims of crime that placed Manitoba among the world leaders in assisting victims of crime. In referring to Manitoba as a world leader, I am quoting from an article that was written by Professor Irvin Waller who has done an outstanding job in pressing for programs to assist victims of crime.

As a Parliament we should acknowledge the contribution that he has made not only nationally but internationally in a variety of forums, including the United Nations in pursuing aggressively the rights of victims of crime. Indeed, it was as a result of his work, and the work of other dedicated individuals that, in 1985, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a detailed declaration on victims rights calling upon all member countries to do far more to prevent crime and provide for programs to assist victims of crime.

In a few moments I wish to talk about the importance of prevention of crime as well as assisting victims of crime. One of the most effective ways of dealing with concerns about victims of crime is to take the steps as a society to reduce the number of victims of crime. There are a variety of steps that can and should be taken.

The legislation before us, Bill C-89, while it does represent an important step forward, there is still a great deal of work left to be done. For example, I suggest that the federal Government could be showing the way with respect to policing. After all, in many cases, the first contact the victims have is with the police. With respect to policing, the RCMP could establish guidelines for members of the force to give the victim information on services and remedies that are available, as well as the manner in which the victim might be informed while the investigation continues.

The Bill before the House should be amended. I intend to propose an amendment that would require police officers to inform victims of crime at the earliest possible opportunity of their right to possible compensation under provincial legislation, and possibly also restitution if the aggressor is caught and convicted, and also of their right to make a victim impact statement to the court. Rights without awareness of those rights are hollow. Who better to ensure that victims of crime are made aware of those rights than the person with whom they first come in contact? I speak here of the police. I suggest that this is an important amendment.

I mentioned the possibility of restitution. This Bill does indeed provide for the possibility of restitution. We have to be realistic in examining this proposal and recognize that it is not likely in real terms that many victims of crime or their families will in practice be able to receive restitution from the perpetrator of the crime.