

*Government Orders*

With respect to the Divorce Act, the major change in the Divorce Act appears to be the simplification of the law so that it will be easier for former spouses living in different provinces to apply for custody or a support order.

• (1350)

With respect to the Family Order and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act this will also reduce costs, this time for investigating child abduction. The proposed amendments remove the requirement that police officers get court authorization to use general federal data banks for tracing individuals in cases of spousal child abduction.

The witnesses who came before the legislative committee were of the opinion that this bill was a step forward. However, they felt that the whole process needed to go a lot further than was the case under these amendments. The problems that exist in the maintenance of children of parents who are separated or divorced is just not satisfactory and in fact is totally unacceptable.

We have a large number of children at risk who are not receiving the support that their single mothers can give and that is really no fault of the single mothers. To give an example, in a study of broken marriages by Statistics Canada which was done in June of last year men who paid alimony and child support had incomes more than twice as much as their partners who were looking after the children.

It is quite a shocking statistic that the husbands paying the money have incomes of more than twice as much as the mothers looking after the children. I say the mothers because the parent who is paying the maintenance in 98 per cent of the cases is the father and the other 2 per cent of course is the mother looking after the children.

That does not leave a lot of funding for the mother and children to live on. This statistic was based on the tax situation in 1988 but according to Statistics Canada very little had changed since 1988 so the problem is still there.

The study also showed that alimony and child support on average made up only 15 per cent of the income of the women who received it. That is an unfair statistic I would suggest because what we are talking about here are a large number of cases where the custodial parent

does not receive any maintenance whatsoever. If you average it out over all the families that are separated or divorced where one parent is looking after children and receiving maintenance from the other the income of the mother and children existing in the family is only 15 per cent.

It gives you an idea of how serious the situation is in our communities. What we are talking about are the children of Canada, a large number of children. It is certainly not the majority of children, but a very large number have become children at risk through the system and its neglect or its insufficient attention. These children will be the citizens of tomorrow. We are not guarding this resource. Not only are we not guarding it we are in many cases abandoning its welfare.

We have heard more and more of the situation that exists with respect to crime in our communities. Now more than ever we are concentrating on crime prevention and the reduction of violence in our communities.

While we are concentrating on this and talking about longer sentences for offenders, while we are talking about retribution, more and more evidence is coming forward that we need rehabilitation, treatment and care for the young people in our society.

One psychiatrist testified before the Standing Committee on Justice which studied the question of crime prevention. This psychiatrist is very knowledgeable in crime prevention and children at risk, the very young people in our community. He testified that the most important age for assistance as far as the reduction of crime is concerned, where our dollar can have the greatest impact in reducing crime, is between the time the child is born and the child's third or fourth birthday.

Now that is quite a significant statement. It shows that the younger the child is the more of an impact we can have in bringing that child forward as a citizen who does not resent his or her treatment in society and who does not represent a child at risk who could become a potential violator of the laws in this country.

It has also been said by many and the statistic that sticks in my mind is that for every dollar we put into the welfare of a child below the age of seven we will save \$7 in reduced cost to the community in incarceration, rehabilitation, court costs and police costs. Investing \$1 will save \$7 if we want to look after our very young people.