

*Government Orders*

program. I am sure all members realize the importance of witness and source protection. Governments must be able to help ensure the safety and security of persons who assist police and prosecutors in their efforts to crack down on crime.

Experience shows that witnesses or sources who provide evidence or who assist in police investigations at risk of harm to themselves or their families are often among the most effective tools our justice system has against crime, especially organized crime.

The intent of the witness protection program act is to ensure our federal witness protection program offers the best possible protection to potential witnesses and sources.

• (1025)

[Translation]

The proposed changes to the act will make the current RCMP source witness protection program—which has been in effect since 1984 as a strictly administrative program—more transparent and more efficient, by providing sound statutory and regulatory authority.

[English]

In short, we are creating a witness protection program which for the first time will have a legislative base. This will have the important effect of placing the RCMP source witness protection program more in the public domain.

I know this was a major concern of my colleague, the member for Scarborough West, when he put forward his private member's bill on witness protection. His bill provided a useful basis for discussion of the issues leading to Bill C-78. I again thank him for his efforts.

Under the bill there will now be clear accountability for the operation of the RCMP source witness protection program. While the identities of sources and witnesses will remain secret, the selection criteria, the decision making process and the scope and the extent of the protection to be provided will be transparent and clear. This will help ensure that both applicants who enter the program and the RCMP which operates it have a clear understanding of their respective rights and obligations as well as the extent and scope of the protection to be provided.

[Translation]

This should also prevent any misunderstanding between the RCMP and those it seeks to protect. Overall, the changes to the RCMP source witness protection program will meet the needs of police departments, as well as those of witnesses and sources requiring protection.

[English]

The proposed changes will ensure clearly defined admission criteria for witnesses, the consistent handling of cases across the country, and the clear setting out of the responsibilities and obligations both of the administrators of the program and of the

individuals entering it. The bill will also ensure a more defined management structure within the RCMP for the daily operation of the program, thereby increasing accountability.

Furthermore the bill will ensure a complaints procedure is in place and that the commissioner of the RCMP will submit to the solicitor general an annual report on the operation of the program which then must be tabled in the House.

Provincial and municipal law enforcement agencies will still, as they have done in the past, be able to participate in the RCMP source witness protection program on a cost recovery basis. However the bill is not intended to replace other witness protection programs run by provincial police forces and by some municipal police forces.

In keeping with the government's program of fiscal restraint, the changes to the RCMP source witness protection program arising out of the bill will be funded out of existing resources.

When the government was elected it made a commitment to a safe homes, safe streets agenda. Since taking office we have been honouring that commitment. We have introduced Bill C-45 to bring about an updating of our corrections and parole system. This bill has now been passed by the House and is being studied in the other place.

We have created a system using the Canadian Police Information Centre data banks to help screen out sexual abusers as potential employees and volunteers working with children. We have established also using the CPIC data banks a national flagging system to help provincial crown attorneys to make more frequent and more effective use of the dangerous offender provisions of the Criminal Code as an instrument to protect the public better from dangerous high risk offenders.

• (1030)

We have introduced comprehensive gun control proposals, proposals adopted by the House and under study in the other place. We have created a national crime prevention council. We have passed amendments to the Young Offenders Act. We have passed Bill C-41 to reform the sentencing process. We have passed legislation that would prevent extreme intoxication from being used as a defence to excuse violence and other serious crimes. We have passed legislation that permits a provincial court judge to issue a warrant allowing police to obtain body samples from suspects for forensic DNA analysis.

The Witness Protection Program Act is another important component in our overall effort to improve the safety and security of all Canadians. I urge all hon. members to support Bill C-78. In this respect I thank the hon. Reform Party member for Surrey—White Rock—South Langley when she was solicitor general critic for having expressed her support of the bill. Therefore I look forward to and I ask for similar support from all other members of the House to ensure speedy passage of Bill C-78.