

Government Orders

protected by society in a legislated way, in an open way, not in some quiet and shadowy backroom without possibility of appeal, without possibility of redress in the event that there is some misunderstanding.

By the way, that is another good point. There will be written reasons given by the commissioner if people are turned down so they are not left out there with their heads spinning, unable to comprehend why the system did not protect them.

I support the bill. I am very grateful the House supports the bill. I am grateful to the minister for bringing it forward. As I began, I am grateful for all the kind comments that have been made about me by members of the House.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anna Terrana (Vancouver East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank RCMP officers for the consistently good work they do for Canadians. I am satisfied that they will continue to have operational control over this program.

The protection of witnesses is one of the most useful and efficient tools to fight crime. In order to be effective, witness protection programs must provide the best possible protection to likely sources and witnesses. This is precisely what the Witness Protection Program Act seeks to do.

The proposed changes to the legislation will allow sources and witnesses participating in the program to fully understand the terms and conditions under which they will be protected. As well, the decisions and the measures taken by the authority responsible for the program, namely the RCMP, will be more transparent. This will result in a more transparent and efficient operation of the program, while also contributing to the government's efforts to implement the act and thus stop crime, particularly organized crime.

• (1305)

The proposed changes in the Witness Protection Program Act will provide sound statutory and regulatory authority to the RCMP program by establishing a federally legislated witness protection program.

The new legislation will provide the following: clearly defined eligibility criteria for witnesses; identical treatment all across the country; a clear statement on the responsibilities and obligations of program officials and participants; a better defined management structure within the RCMP regarding the daily operation of the programs, so as to strengthen accountability; a complaint settlement process as well as the presentation, by the RCMP commissioner, of an annual report to the solicitor general on the operation of the program.

The RCMP source witness protection program was established in 1984 to meet the specific needs of that police force regarding the protection of sources and witnesses. Other witness

protection programs are run by a number of provinces and municipalities.

Police departments using these programs also rely on the RCMP source witness protection program, under a cost recovery system, and this will continue to be the case. The RCMP helps other protection programs by obtaining I.D. documents delivered by the federal government—including passports and social insurance cards—when a name change is necessary, or by facilitating the relocation of witnesses in another province.

During the 1994–95 fiscal year, the RCMP was able, through its source witness protection program, to provide protection services to 70 new clients. In 30 of these cases, the services were provided at the request of other organizations. The RCMP currently allocates \$3.4 million annually to witness protection activities.

The changes made to the RCMP source witness protection program will not result in additional spending. The program will continue to be financed with current resources.

The provinces and territories were consulted and they support the proposed changes in the Witness Protection Program Act.

When a decision is made to admit an applicant to the RCMP's source witness protection program, the following factors will be taken into consideration: the potential contribution that the witness or source can make toward a particular police investigation, the nature of the offence under investigation, the nature of the risk to the individual, what alternate methods of protection are available, the danger to the community if the individual is admitted to the program, the potential effects on any family arrangements, the likelihood of the individual being able to adjust, their maturity, their ability to make judgments and other personal characteristics, the cost of maintaining the individual in the program and other factors as the commissioner of the RCMP may find to be relevant.

Under the Witness Protection Program Act, there will be a clear and defined decision making process to admit an individual into the program. In serious cases, such as those requiring a change of identity or admission of a foreign national, the decision to admit an individual will be made only by the assistant commissioner in charge of the program. A decision to terminate protection must also be made by the assistant commissioner.

In less serious cases, the decision to protect an individual may be made by someone at the chief superintendent level.

Finally, the changes introduced in the Witness Protection Program Act were drafted following consultations with the RCMP and various police forces across the country who were asked to contribute their views. These changes will help make the RCMP's source witness protection program more open.