

*Young Offenders Act*

indicates his concern and support for the legislation, which will upgrade the young offenders legislation which has been 70 years in the process.

Another letter I received was from Susan Berzins, who indicates her feeling that this legislation will be of benefit to young offenders since they will be entitled to more rights, such as the right to legal representation and the right to appeal.

Another letter I wish to refer to is from Leah Brunelle, who says in her letter:

As for the maximum age, I tend to disagree with the act strongly. If an individual can receive their operator's licence, have a job, or live on their own, they then can therefore accept the responsibilities of an adult.

In other words, Miss Brunelle supports the recommendation of the maximum age being 16 years. This is a matter which we advocated in our legislation and it is something about which we would like to see some consistency across Canada. It is now flexible and the provinces indicate whether the maximum age should be 16, 17 or 18. In the event that the provinces cannot reach a consensus, we would have set the age at 16 if we had formed the government.

Another letter I received was from Fiona Gunn-Graham. She illustrates the good and bad points as far the legislation is concerned. I would like to share with the House a number of the points she considered good. She endorses the objective which ensures that young offenders benefit from all the rights and protections enjoyed by adults. She endorses the principle that society must be protected from illegal behaviour. She says that it must be recognized that young persons, because of their lack of maturity, require guidance and assistance. She also recognizes that young persons have rights and freedoms equal to adults and that they have the right to be heard in the courts and the right to participate in the process which leads to decisions affecting them.

I would now like to turn to a letter from Herman Andrés. He says that this act will be a welcome replacement for the inadequate Juvenile Delinquents Act.

Another letter I received was from Wes Marko who supports, in general, the legislation before us.

Karen Kartz wrote to me to point out that it would be beneficial to have juveniles detained in separate quarters from adults. She disagrees with youths being photographed and fingerprinted. Under the legislation before us, in the event that an individual is acquitted, the photographs and fingerprints will be immediately destroyed. After a period of two years for summary conviction offences, if the offender commits no further crime, and after a period of five years in the case of indictable offences, the records will be destroyed.

Another letter I would mention is from Colleen Ropser, who indicates her feelings that members of Parliament and of the legislatures should be aware that young people do require a certain amount of discipline. But, more than discipline, she feels they require guidance.

I have two more letters to which I wish to refer. I do not want to take up too much of the time of the House with these

letters, but I think it important that these individuals feel that they have a meaningful role to play in our democratic process.

The next letter is from Lyn Wolgien. She says that she thinks the Juvenile Delinquents Act of 1908 should be revised in order to meet the requirements of today's changing world. It is gratifying to know that we have a piece of legislation before us which more or less receives the unanimous support of this House. We hope that some corrections will be made to it when we come to the clause by clause study of it.

The final letter I have here is from Andrew Singh. I will not refer to any of the specifics contained in it, but I would like to underscore the contribution he made in the discussions we had at the Salisbury Composite High School. I must say that I was encouraged to see young people such as those who wrote to me interested in our legislative process. I was pleased to see they took time out of their busy schedules to correspond with me and express their concerns with respect to this legislation.

As I indicated earlier, Mr. Speaker, this legislation was not before the House at the time I spoke with these students. I forwarded to them copies of the bill. All of us in this chamber can applaud the young people of our society throughout Canada for the responsible manner in which they approach many of the frustrating decisions which they must make in this day and age.

As a father of three sons aged 14, 12 and eight, I realize some of the difficulties which our young people face. While this piece of legislation seems to deal with a narrow subject, in reality it deals with a much broader topic. Young people of today must deal with values, family life and the moral fibre of society.

As my colleague the hon. member for Crowfoot stated earlier, some of the statistics which are before us are very worrisome. When we look at the figures we find that there has been an increase of some 60 per cent in violent juvenile delinquency from 1974 to 1978. Most shocking of all is the increase in violence by young people against themselves. In the past decade the suicide rate for young people aged 15 to 19 years of age has increased some 59 per cent. These are just a few of the reasons for the need to take a good, hard look at the best way for society to respond to young people and their needs.

If we are to be serious about the problems faced by young people who come into conflict with the law, we must collectively look at such issues as child abuse, our divorce rate, the reasons for teenage suicide, the relationship between crime and the criminal in the early years of development and the over-all mental health picture of our young people. This will enable all of society to grow in the knowledge of the character and personality development in a child's early years.

In my closing remarks I would like to speak to the amendment which is before us. I support the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Durham-Northumberland (Mr. Lawrence) and seconded by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour). They suggest that the maximum age in the Young Offenders Act should be consistent through-