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Écoutées. Respectées. **Les victimes d'abord.**

# **Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security**

## ***Bill C-19: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (Ending the Long-gun Registry Act)***

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Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime  
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## **The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime**

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The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC) is an independent resource for victims in Canada. The Office was created in 2007 to ensure the federal government meets its responsibilities to victims of crime.

Victims can contact the Office to learn more about their rights under federal law and the services available to them, or to make a complaint about any federal agency or federal legislation dealing with victims of crime. In addition to its direct work with victims, the Office also works to ensure that policy makers and other criminal justice personnel are aware of victims' needs and concerns and to identify important issues and trends that may negatively impact victims. Where appropriate, the Ombudsman may also make recommendations to the federal government.

Our mandate relates exclusively to matters of federal jurisdiction and enables the Office:

- to promote access by victims to existing federal programs and services for victims;
- to address complaints of victims about compliance with the provisions of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* that apply to victims of crimes committed by offenders under federal jurisdiction;
- to promote awareness of the needs and concerns of victims and the applicable laws that benefit victims of crime, including to promote the principles set out in the *Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime* with respect to matters of federal jurisdiction, among criminal justice personnel and policy makers;
- to identify and review emerging and systemic issues, including those issues related to programs and services provided or administered by the Department of Justice or the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, that impact negatively on victims of crime; and
- to facilitate access by victims to existing federal programs and services by providing them with information and referrals.

## **Position**

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The OFOVC was created to be a voice for victims, and my commitment as Federal Ombudsman is to carry out that vision and ensure that victims and victim-serving organizations across the country have an opportunity to have their voice heard by the federal government.

As part of this commitment, my Office discussed the matter of the long-gun registry with numerous victims and/or victim-serving agencies across the country. While there was no consensus, the clear majority of those I spoke with were in favour of maintaining the long-gun registry.

In light of both these views and our own information and research, as Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime I do not support the passage and coming into force of Bill C-19.

## **Rationale**

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The long-gun registry has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing long-gun related homicides and continues to be a valuable tool in assisting law enforcement in reducing victimization and keeping our communities safer.

### ***Demonstrated effectiveness***

Long-guns are the most common type of firearm used in spousal homicides. From 1991-2002, 71% of spousal homicides involved rifles and shotguns.<sup>1</sup> While homicide with a long-gun continues to represent the largest proportion of firearm-related spousal homicides, more recent statistics show that the share of firearm-related spousal homicides involving a long gun has dropped significantly to 50%<sup>2</sup>.

Further significant decline can also be seen in the overall number of homicides with long-guns since the introduction of stricter gun control regulations (1991) and the introduction of the gun registry legislation in 1995. As of 2010, the number of homicides involving long-guns since the introduction of the Firearms Act has dropped by 41%<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Tool to reduce victimization***

While the registry is not itself a complete solution, it is one tool that can be used by law enforcement to further reduce victimization.

In fact, statistics show that this tool is frequently used by police services across Canada. On average, police services access the registry 14,385 times *per day* – more than double the

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<sup>1</sup> RCMP, (2002) "Research Summary: Domestic Violence Involving Firearms" Accessed : September 13, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/res-rec/violence-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada (2009). "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile." Catalogue no. 85-224-X. Accessed at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/pdfs/fv-85-224-XWE-eng.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Statics Canada (2010), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey

usage in 2005<sup>4</sup>. Clearly, police forces across Canada are making use of the registry, thereby reinforcing its value as a valuable tool in reducing victimization.

The registry also assists in police investigations – as highlighted in a case in Mayerthorpe Alberta where “two men were identified and convicted as accessories to the murder of four RCMP officers, in part because a registered rifle was left at the scene of the crime”<sup>5</sup> While the registry did not prevent the homicides in this particular case, it did assist law enforcement in successfully convicting violent offenders, thereby ensuring safer streets and communities.

## **Conclusion**

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The devastation and trauma suffered as a result of losing a loved one to violent crime is overwhelming. Victims who are forced to endure this burden can suffer on a variety of levels, including emotionally, mentally, physically and financially.

While the process of coping with tragedy is different for every victim, the majority of victims I have spoken with will tell you this: they do not want what has happened to them to happen to anyone else.

The long-gun registry – though not in and of itself a complete solution – is one tool that can assist law enforcement in preventing further victimization. The registry has demonstrated its clear effectiveness through the decline in firearms-related homicides involving a long-gun and its use as a valuable tool for law enforcement.

I urge the Committee to encourage the Government to reconsider its legislation and to maintain Canada’s long-gun registry.

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<sup>4</sup> RCMP, Canadian Firearms Program. (2011) Fact and Figures (October – December 2010)

<sup>5</sup> CAW Briefing Note on Canada’s Long-Gun Registry – cited from RCMP, (2010); RCMP, Canadian Firearms Program. (2009) Commissioner of Firearms 2008 Report. Ottawa: RCMP