



Heard. Respected. **Victims First.**
Écoutées. Respectées. **Les victimes d'abord.**

OFOVC Update Fall 2017

Greetings from the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC).

Special message from the Ombudsman



Making positive change has always been my passion. Now, it is time for a new change. As of November 15th I will be completing my term as Ombudsman. I hope you will join me in welcoming the incoming Ombudsman, and in supporting them as they continue this important work on behalf of victims and survivors of crime in Canada.

I am so incredibly proud of the work of this Office and everything we have accomplished over the last seven years. Early on in my time as Ombudsman, I released a report called *Shifting the Conversation*, which called on key participants to shift the conversation towards victims and survivors and to acknowledge that it is only in including victims, and helping to meet their needs, that we can have a healthy criminal justice system. I am thrilled to have been able to see that in fact, the conversation *has* shifted. Worldwide, governments are considering how to support victims and survivors, and the movement is gaining momentum. Laws, policies and conversations are changing. In Canada, we saw the introduction of our first-ever victim-specific legislation with the coming into

force of the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights*. Over the years, thanks to the victims and survivors who have come forward to share their stories, federal government policies and practices have been revised, making it easier for victims to get information on the offender who harmed them, to get funding to assist in travelling for parole hearings, to ensure proceedings take victims' well-being into account and to make grants more accessible.

I have had the privilege of hearing from thousands of Canadians about the challenges victims and survivors face, and about the barriers in the criminal justice system that often make them feel re-victimized. Their stories have never been mine to tell, but I have amplified their voices at every opportunity provided to me. I have appeared before dozens of parliamentary committees, made numerous submissions and formal recommendations to Ministers and heads of agency, issued reports, spoken with the media, presented at hundreds of conferences and events, published videos, promoted change with my federal government colleagues and more. I have been inspired by the strength, courage and determination of those working on behalf of victims and have used that inspiration to try to help push forward true, lasting change. Credit for the accomplishments made to date must go to the many victims and survivors who have had the strength and courage to share their journey and experiences.

While we have moved forward, there is still more to be done. We must continue to work to ensure that victims are informed, considered, protected and able to participate in meaningful ways within our criminal justice system. We must push for a system where victims are a part of the process and not an afterthought; and we must ensure that at every step there are choices and options for victims, while supporting their well-being. Towards this, I hope that the government will consider and act upon the recommendations we have put forward with respect to enhancing the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights*, resolving the gap that exists for victims when it comes to deportation issues and in preparing in advance to support victims in cases of mass victimization.

The progress of this Office would not have been possible without my team of talented, passionate and dedicated staff who work hard every day on behalf of

victims and survivors. I want to thank them for everything, and to wish them well in their continued work.

Finally, I would like to extend a very heartfelt thank you to everyone I have worked with and heard from during my time as Ombudsman, in particular the victims, survivors and their families who have used their voices to push for change. From the early leaders in the victims' movement to those fighting for a more balanced system today, it is by working together, building relationships and collaborating that change is made. I commend you, and I thank you for all that you do every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

[Our work](#)

Over the past few months, the OFOVC has been occupied with a systemic review of the Federal Income Support for Parents of Murdered or Missing Children Grant and presentations at domestic and international conferences. The summer was particularly busy, with all hands on deck to deliver our contribution to the federal government's review of the criminal justice system. As always, our objective is to provide a victims' perspective on the issues under discussion.

We also continued to assist the Canadians who contacted the OFOVC with questions and complaints and encouraged federal organizations to recognize and respond to victims' needs.

[Systemic Review of the grant program for parents of murdered and missing children](#)

As part of our work to amplify victims' voices and ensure victim's needs are considered, the OFOVC continues to provide recommendations to policy makers on issues which may affect victims of crime.

In August, the Ombudsman presented the Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada with the results of her systemic review of the Income Support for Parents of Murdered and Missing Children (PMMC) grant program administered by Service Canada. The PMMC grant program was created to provide income support to parents who need to take time off work to cope with the death or disappearance of a child due to a probable *Criminal Code* offence. The Ombudsman conducted the review because the PMMC grant was not being used to its full potential, leaving important victim-support funding unused.

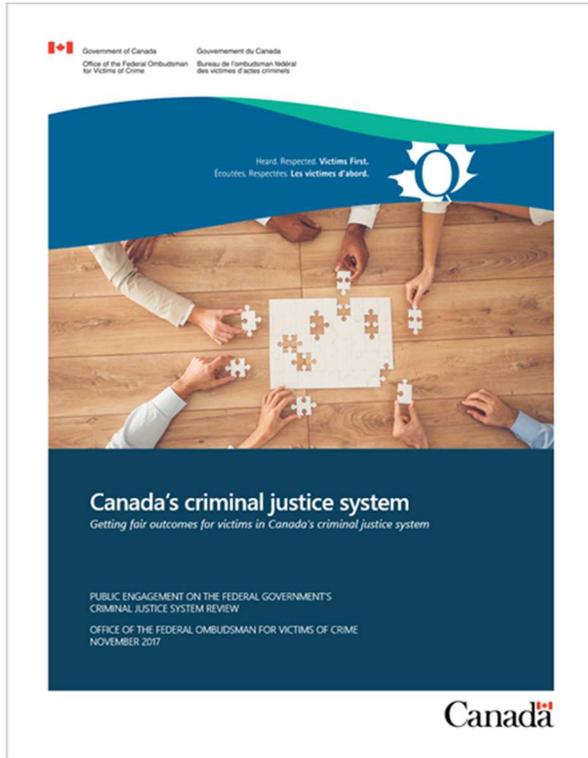
The Ombudsman found that:

- Available research indicates that victimization has significant socio-economic impacts on victims and their families.
- Original estimates were that the PMMC grant would provide assistance for up to 1,000 families per year, yet in its first three fiscal years of operation, only 28 applications were received.
- While \$33 million was budgeted for this purpose from fiscal years 2012-2013 to 2015-2016, actual grant payouts to parents have been minimal, totaling just \$223,300.

The Ombudsman made a suite of recommendations aimed at simplifying the application process, increasing program flexibility and broadening eligibility requirements, and reducing potential barriers to uptake.

The full report may be found here: <http://victimsfirst.gc.ca/res/pub/FISP-SRFP/index.html>

OFOVC engagement—Getting fair outcomes for victims in Canada’s criminal justice system



A key part of the Ombudsman’s work is to advise the Minister of Justice on victims’ needs and expectations in relation to Canada’s federal laws, services and policies.

In August 2017 the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime launched a national engagement process to hear from those with lived experiences of victimization, victim service providers, victim advocacy organizations, and other victims’ issues experts about how Canada could better support victims and survivors of crime.

The engagement was undertaken in response to the Government of Canada’s commitment to reviewing the criminal justice system, with the intention of providing timely, relevant and informed options to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada for how to transform federal laws, legislation, services and policies. The engagement focused on areas of interest to the Government, such as: bail reform, administration of justice issues and restorative justice; as well as on the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights*.

What we heard

Overall, the Ombudsman found that confidence in the criminal justice system was low. Victims and survivors wanted to see the system transform towards one that was more compassionate to victims, met the needs of vulnerable groups, offered more choices and options, and which responded to the realities of complex issues, such as domestic violence.

The Ombudsman expressed her thanks to the participants: “What I love most about my work and the work of this Office is that we bring victims’ voices to the table in a concrete way. We are so grateful for the time that victims, service providers and other experts gave to this process. They have so many important ideas we knew would be of value to the Minister of Justice and the Government in their work to transform the criminal justice system into one that is more compassionate, balanced and effective.”

The Ombudsman’s reports on her findings can be found on the OFOVC website: <http://victimsfirst.gc.ca/res/pub/GFO-ORE/index.html>.

Annual Report



The OFOVC’s 2015-2016 Annual Report, which summarizes the Office’s key activities and recommendations in its ongoing work to assist victims of crime in Canada, was released in early summer. The report may be found on the OFOVC’s website:

<http://victimsfirst.gc.ca/res/pub/ar1516-ra1516/index.html>

Upcoming events

Restorative Justice Week November 19-26, 2017



The theme for 2017 is “Inspiring Innovation”. The National Restorative Justice Symposium will be held in Ottawa on November 19-21. The Symposium raises awareness of a restorative approach to addressing crime and conflict. This year's Symposium is being hosted by the Collaborative Justice Program in partnership with the Church Council on Justice and Corrections.

For further information: <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/003005-2000-eng.shtml>

Share your thoughts!

If there is a victims’ issue you think deserves more attention or further study, please call us at 1-866-481-8429 or email us at victimfirst@ombudsman.gc.ca.

Stay connected!

We invite you to visit our website at www.victimfirst.gc.ca and to follow us on Twitter, where we regularly post information to help raise awareness about victims’ rights, services available to victims and upcoming events. Our handle is [@OFOVC BOFVAC](https://twitter.com/OFOVC_BOFVAC).