
News Release

GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO STRENGTHEN THE *YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT*

“Sébastien’s Law” focuses on violent and repeat young offenders

OTTAWA, March 16, 2010 – The Honourable Rob Nicholson, P.C., Q.C., M.P. for Niagara Falls, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, today announced the introduction of amendments to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) to strengthen its handling of violent and repeat young offenders. He was joined in the announcement by the Honourable Christian Paradis, Minister of Natural Resources, and Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu.

“The legislation introduced today will give Canadians greater confidence that violent and repeat young offenders will be held accountable,” said Minister Nicholson. “It will help ensure that the protection of society is given due consideration in sentencing these offenders.”

“This legislation is entitled Sébastien’s Law, in memory of Sébastien Lacasse, and to honour the dedication of his parents, Line and Luc,” said Minister Paradis. “The Lacasse family and other courageous families have worked tirelessly as advocates for the rights of victims, to make a difference in the lives of others. In bringing forward this bill we are acknowledging all Canadian families who have lost loved ones in crimes involving youth violence.”

The proposed amendments to the YCJA would:

- make protection of society a primary goal of the *Act*;
- simplify the rules to keep violent and repeat young offenders off the streets while awaiting trial, when necessary to protect society;
- require the courts to consider adult sentences for youth convicted of the most serious crimes – murder, attempted murder, manslaughter and aggravated assault;
- enable the courts to impose more appropriate sentences on other violent and repeat offenders, as necessary in individual cases – to use existing sanctions in a way that would discourage an individual from offending again, to use a pattern of escalating criminal activity to seek a custodial sentence when necessary, and to impose a custodial sentence for reckless behaviour that puts the lives and safety of others at risk; and
- require the courts to consider publishing the name of a violent young offender when necessary for the protection of society.

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Regarding the requirement to consider adult sentences for youth convicted of the most serious crimes, the provinces and territories will still have the discretion to set the age at which this requirement would apply.

The legislation would also ensure that offenders under the age of 18 who are sentenced to custody will be placed in youth facilities only, even if they receive an adult sentence.

“Our government is proud to stand up for the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens,” said Senator Boisvenu. “Today, we have taken an important step forward in strengthening our youth criminal justice system. We are helping ensure that justice will be served, and that Canadians will be protected from violent and repeat offenders.”

An on-line version of the legislation will be available at www.parl.gc.ca.

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