
Re: The Right to Restorative Justice for Sexual Violence Survivors
June 9th, 2025

To the Attorney General,

We, the undersigned organizations, survivors and advocates, write to express our collective concern regarding Crown Policy D4, which deems sexual violence cases ineligible for community justice programs. We urge the Attorney General to revise this policy and allow survivors of sexual violence to access restorative justice options when they choose to pursue this path.

A) Who We Are

Survivors 4 Justice Reform is a global coalition of survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, human trafficking, and allies advocating for trauma-informed justice reform. Our mission is to promote alternatives to the criminal legal system, such as restorative and transformative justice. We believe in a future where survivors can choose justice pathways that align with their individual healing, fostering accountability and safety for all. We recognize that restorative justice practices are not new innovations, but are deeply rooted in Indigenous traditions, including those of many Nations across Turtle Island and the Māori people of Aotearoa. These practices were grounded in relationality, collective accountability, and the sacredness of all beings - values that were actively undermined by colonial systems of violence.

B) Why This Policy Fails Survivors

1. Denial of Survivor-Centered Justice Options: Crown Policy D4 categorically excludes sexual violence cases from community justice programs, denying survivors the opportunity to engage in restorative justice processes that may better align with their healing and justice needs. According to the LEAF (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) *Avenues to Justice Report* (2023), restorative justice offers a survivor-centered approach that prioritizes safety, autonomy, and meaningful accountability. Denying survivors this option perpetuates a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to meet the complex realities of sexual violence.
2. Re-traumatization by the Criminal Legal System: The adversarial nature of the traditional criminal justice system often leads to re-traumatization. A survey of 53 victim support services revealed that 83% of advocates reported that the court process regularly retraumatized their clients, and nearly all respondents stated that survivors expressed regret over pressing charges due to the distress caused by the legal process (*Avenues to Justice Report*, 2023). Survivors are not recognized as victims in the system—they are reduced to “complainants,” treated as witnesses to the Crown rather than humans who have experienced harm. By restricting access to restorative justice, D4 forces survivors into a system that many find retraumatizing, removing their agency and leaving them with no alternative path to justice.

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3. Underreporting of Sexual Violence: The inadequacies of the current system contribute to a troubling reality: only 6% of sexual assaults in Canada are reported to police, making it the most underreported crime in the country (Statistics Canada). Survivors choose not to report for numerous reasons: 43% believe the offender won't face any consequences and 42% want to avoid the re-traumatizing nature of the court process (Statistics Canada). D4 removes a justice option that could encourage reporting, leaving many without a viable path to justice while perpetrators remain unaccountable and cycles of violence continue.

C) Why Survivors Need Access to Restorative Justice

- **Empowerment and Choice:** Restorative justice empowers survivors by allowing them to define their own healing. Survivors are given space to articulate the impact of harm and engage in a process where their voice is centered. According to The Star ("The Right to Choose Restorative Justice," 2024), restorative justice processes report an 88% satisfaction rate among victims, indicating that survivors feel heard, validated, and supported in these processes.
- **Accountability, Public Safety and Violence Prevention:** Restorative justice facilitates deeper accountability by focusing on understanding the harm caused and requiring those responsible to take meaningful steps toward repair. Unlike punitive models, which often fail to address root causes of harm, restorative approaches reduce recidivism rates by promoting genuine behavioral change (Avenues to Justice Report, 2023). While some argue that restorative justice is too soft an approach for something as serious as sexual violence, we recognize that restorative justice organizations have long developed power-informed processes to effectively disrupt violence and enhance accountability. As Statistics Canada reported in 2022, rates of sexual violence have not declined in Canada since 1996 and therefore, we must question whether leaving the criminal legal system as the sole option for addressing sexual violence is within the public's best interest.

D) Our Call to Action

We respectfully urge the Attorney General to revise Crown Policy D4 and allow for the inclusion of sexual violence cases in community justice programs when survivors request restorative justice. Survivors should not be denied access to restorative justice based on a blanket policy that ignores their voices and lived experiences. Restorative Justice can play an essential role in addressing the harm caused by colonial systems, honouring Indigenous wisdom and disrupting the harm the criminal legal system inflicts on 2SQT-BIPOC the most. Denying this option reinforces the harmful and inaccurate narrative that the colonial system is the 'one legitimate path to justice' while undermining the autonomy and dignity of survivors who seek alternative approaches.



admin@survivors4justicereform.com
survivors4justicereform.com

Survivors 4 Justice Reform would also like to formally request a meeting with the Attorney General and/or the Deputy Attorney General of Ontario to discuss this urgent issue in greater detail. This meeting would provide an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue about the barriers created by Crown Policy D4 and explore actionable solutions to ensure survivors can access justice pathways that best serve their healing.

We, the undersigned, stand together to demand that restorative justice be made accessible for survivors of sexual violence who seek this approach. We are organizations and survivor advocates committed to creating a justice system that is humane and capable of breaking cycles of violence. Please see the signatories below. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

In solidarity,

Survivors 4 Justice Reform

On behalf of the undersigned signatories:

1. Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC), Jan Vesna, Director of Programs
2. The Digital Sexual Violence Support Centre, Natasha Dixon, Founder
3. No More Silence, Audrey Huntley, Co-founder
4. Durham Rape Crisis Center (DRCC)
5. Watching over Women Empowerment Centre, Monique Cunningham, Founder
6. Amelia Rising Sexual Violence Support Centre
7. Sistering: A Woman's Place, Women's Shelter
8. Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), Pam Hrick, Executive Director
9. The Gatehouse, Arthur Lockhart, Founder Emeritus
10. The Gatehouse, Maria Barcelos, Executive Director
11. Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region
12. End Violence Everywhere, Cait Alexander, Founder
13. The Journey Project, Janet Lee, Provincial Director
14. Survivors Council Canada, Arthur Lockhart
15. CONSENTparenting™, Rosalia Rivera, Founder
16. Voiceless Beyond Bars, Director, Sarah DeArmond
17. Harm Reduction Action Collective (HRAC),
18. Harassment Awareness & Safe Space Leaders
19. Mokami Status of Women Council, Stacey Hoffe, Executive Director
20. International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP Canada), Pat Lewis, Executive Director
21. Collaborative Justice Program: Restorative Justice Ottawa, Amber Montgomery, Executive Director
22. Community Justice Initiatives of Waterloo Region, Kate Crozier, Interim Executive Director
23. Ottawa Transformative Justice Collective, Jeffrey Bradley, University of Ottawa
24. Facilitation and Mediation from the Heart, Jeff Carolin, JD, Q.Med
25. Université de Montreal, University Professor of Victimology
26. This Woman's Truth, Director and Founder
27. Restorative Justice Victoria
28. University of Guelph-Humber, Laura MacDiarmid Assistant Professor
29. Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association, Kaylie Maughan, Executive Director
30. Lincoln Alexander School of Law at Toronto Metropolitan University, Legal Clinic, Jessica Gadea

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Signatories continued:

31. London Abused Women's Centre, Jennifer Dunn, Executive Director
32. Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre, Dalya Israel, Executive Director
33. Students for Consent Culture (SFCC), Board Member
34. Sheltering Oak Psychotherapy
35. Bird Bolt Law, Nicole Biros-Bolton, Lawyer
36. Ben Law, Barrister & Solicitor
37. Toronto Police Services Board, Former Chair, Alok Mukherjee
38. The Humanization Project, Fatimah Muwahhid
39. Collaborative Justice Program, Howard Bebbington, Member of the Board of Directors
40. InsideOut Intelligence, Heidi Philip, Founder
41. Humber Polytechnic, Sara Varvaris, Care Coordinator
42. Ontario Injustice, Director and Founder
43. Trent University, Assistant Professor Criminology, Mandi Gray
44. Rotenberg Shidlowki Jesin, Jacob Jesin, Criminal Lawyer
45. Healing First!, Kage Johnson, Program Director
46. She Matters, Jacqueline Villeneuve-Ahmed, Director
47. Huronia Transition Homes, Haily MacDonald, Executive Director
48. Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre, Jennifer Hastings, Gender Based Violence Navigator
49. All of you Wellness Centre, Don Edwards, Ph.D., RP Executive Director
50. We Are Girl. Strong., Yollanda Zhang, Founder and Executive Director
51. SOAR Initiative Canada, Christie Paschakis, Founder and Director
52. Leading Authentically, Lexi Salt, Founder and Director