

Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime
Legislation, Policy and Programs
Justice and Community Safety Directorate
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Red Cross Input to Development of Charter

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to provide some input into your considerations as you develop the Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime (the Charter).

I apologise for the slight delay in providing this input. I hope these few thoughts might still be useful to you as you develop the drafts for consideration by the Commissioner, Minister and others.

As I mentioned at the recent consultation forum you convened, Australian Red Cross is supportive of the development of the Charter. It offers an opportunity to make clear our community's commitment to ensure that the victims of crime are supported and fairly treated in our justice systems. This is critical in order to maintain the confidence of the community in our police, court and wider justice systems.

In order to achieve the ambitious but very worthwhile objectives of the ACT's Justice Reinvestment Strategy, Red Cross believes it is important that the community is fully supportive of these policies and the initiatives to implement them. Improving Canberra residents' understanding of the benefits of the Justice Reinvestment approaches is vital so that we are able to have broad community participation and support for decreasing the number of those who are incarcerated and providing a wider range of options for how criminals are dealt with. This will reap benefits for these individuals as well as the community and lead to significant budget savings.

The proposed Charter is a very important complementary initiative to those underpinning the Justice Reinvestment approaches. The Charter and range of practical initiatives to support its implementation, should increase confidence that justice and fair treatment of victims can be achieved at the same time as developing more humane approaches to those who commit minor offences and a broader range of alternative rehabilitation options for those who commit more serious offences.

Some specific thoughts that might be of use in your development of the Charter are as follows:

- Many victims of crime may not be completely clear about the decisions that courts make in relation to the offences committed against them; a 'court

decisions translation service' might be helpful in this regard and ensure that victims understand the results and the rationale behind the court's decisions, hopefully leading to more common and complete 'closure' for those individuals; perhaps the South Australian Commissioner's role and capacity in this regard might be worth closer investigation.

- I mentioned in the recent consultation forum that Red Cross has been piloting a Court Workshop with the participants in our ACT Government funded *Birth Family Advocacy Support Service* (the Service). We have found that this provides significant benefits to individuals who are engaging in the court process; increasing their knowledge of how the courts work, their confidence about engaging in it, and their ability to prepare for and achieve their goals. It may be possible to develop a version of this workshop that would benefit the victims of crime as they prepare for participating in the cases against individuals who are alleged to have committed offences against them. We would be happy to share further details on this approach if you believe there may be merit in its consideration.
- Following from both of these thoughts, it may be worth considering providing some sort of 'intermediary' support service for those groups of ACT residents who experience higher than average rates of offences against them; including, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, those with a disability, refugees and older people.
- In relation to these thoughts, it is worth repeating what others raised at the forum in regard to using existing 'trusted' people to play these and other support roles; that is, wherever there is an existing trusted service provider working with an individual or family, they may well be the best to offer the kind of support services and information and intermediary roles that could help victims understand and work through the processes around their experiences.
- A thoughtful and concerted public communications and education strategy will be vital to support the implementation of any final Charter; it would probably be worthwhile considering how to develop ongoing processes to reward and/or 'shine a light on' good practices carried out by care and protection, police, corrections and court staff so that the role models we want all to be like are clearly identified and praised across our community.

We look forward to the results of your work and we wish you all the best.

Yours sincerely



Matt Davies
Territory Manager
ACT Red Cross
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