



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sexual exploitation should be treated as sexual abuse by the courts says a BC expert on sexual exploitation

Children of the Street advocates for new judges to be educated in sexual exploitation, like now-required sexual assault training

Coast Salish Territories | June 29, 2021 - Children of the Street, a BC-based program dedicated to increasing the awareness, education, and prevention of child sexual exploitation and human trafficking, is advocating for judges to be educated in these issues as part of the newly required training on sexual assault.

On June 22, 2021, the organization sent letters to Hon. David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and Hon. Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, requesting the addition.

In May, Bill C-3 – federal legislation requiring new judges agree to undergo training on sexual assault before they're appointed to the bench – passed the Senate and became law in Canada. Children of the Street would like to see sexual exploitation added to this required training.

“We applaud the recent passage of Bill C-3 requiring judges to receive training on sexual assault,” says Camila Jimenez, who is the Program Manager at Children of the Street and a provincial expert on the issue. “However, we believe child/youth sex trafficking and sexual exploitation is also sexual assault, and that it is vital for judges to be educated on the complexities of these crimes under the sexual assault umbrella, so that they are understood and treated as such by the courts.”

Statistics in Canada show that the crime of human trafficking increased 44% from 2018 to 2019. Ninety-five per cent of human trafficking victims were girls and women, and 21% of these victims were under the age of 18 (43% were between the ages of 18-24).

Online sexual exploitation of children and youth has also increased in Canada. The *Canadian Centre for Child Protection* reported earlier this year, an 88% increase in reported cases of child/youth sexual exploitation. In British Columbia, last year, *RCMP* reported a 122% increase in cases of child/youth online sexual exploitation. The pandemic has exasperated this issue, and world-wide this crime is exploding. In February of this year, the *Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children* reported: “At any one time, 750,000 individuals are estimated to be looking to connect with children online for sexual purposes.”

“Whether on or offline, sexual exploitation and human trafficking is constantly evolving as exploiters find new ways to lure, groom and manipulate their victims,” says Jimenez. “This makes it a difficult crime to recognize, even when it is right in front of you.” Indeed, recent statistics show 89% of human trafficking charges were stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged. Less than one in ten (7%) charges resulted

in a guilty finding. In comparison, 31% of all violent offence charges completed the same year resulted in a finding of guilt¹.

“These staggering statistics are just one of the reasons why we’re encouraging judges to educate themselves on this crime,” adds Jimenez. “By doing so they will be better equipped to use their courts to keep young people safe from those seeking to take advantage of them”.

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Backgrounder

Attached letter to Hon. David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and Hon. Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

About Children of the Street

Children of the Street, a program of PLEA Community Services, is a provincial leader in the fight to keep children and youth safe from sexual exploitation. The program offers children, youth and adults the information and tools they need to keep young people safe from all forms of sexual exploitation. Its initiatives are provided free of charge, and reach more than 25,000 children and youth, as well as 1000 adults annually. For more information, visit www.childrenofthestreet.ca.

About PLEA Community Services

PLEA has been providing individualized, community-based social services throughout B.C. for more than 40 years. It delivers residential and non-residential services to children, youth, adults and families facing significant challenges in their lives. Its work spans child welfare, addictions, health, justice and community living systems. Its focus ranges from preventative – helping children and youth at-risk make good choices under challenging circumstances – to intensive – providing specialized residential services to youth, and adults who are unable to live on their own. Known for creative program development, strong community roots and helping individuals to grow and thrive, the number of lives it touches every year is counted in the tens of thousands. For more information, visit <https://www.plea.ca>.

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¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm>

