

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: December 1, 2016

JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ONTARIO WELCOMES GOVERNMENT BAIL ACTION PLAN

TORONTO – The Ministry of the Attorney General’s (MAG) [Plan for Faster, Fairer Criminal Justice](#) is a long-overdue and critical step towards much-needed bail reform, according to [John Howard Society of Ontario](#) (JHSO). The Plan proposes a number of concrete initiatives aimed at tackling systemic inefficiencies and unfair practices that currently plague Ontario’s bail system.

For years, the John Howard Society of Ontario has been a leading voice in calling for reform to Ontario’s bail system. In 2013, JHSO’s Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development released a report entitled “[Reasonable Bail?](#)”, which argued that Ontario’s bail system was broken and needed rebuilding. The report noted that constitutional guarantees of the presumption of innocence and the right to reasonable bail were being undermined by systemic and organizational shifts. These conclusions remain true today and require more than band-aid solutions.

“The specific measures proposed by MAG follow several of JHSO’s recommendations for repairing the province’s broken bail system,” said Michelle Keast, Director of the Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development. “This is an area of the justice system that desperately needs attention.” Provincial jails are clogged with legally innocent people. More than 60% of people in Ontario’s jails are awaiting a bail decision or trial, and it costs almost \$200 a day to keep them there. To put this in perspective, on any given day in Ontario for every 100 individuals sentenced to custody there are 182 individuals on remand. “The system has been stymied by inefficiency and ineffective, burdensome release orders. Access to bail has been neither reasonable nor timely, during a period where Ontario is experiencing historically low and still-declining crime rates. Today’s announcement is a welcome sign that the government may finally be ready to tackle this important issue.”

MAG’s Plan includes several proposed initiatives that the John Howard Society of Ontario strongly supports. “[Reasonable Bail?](#) provided a number of recommendations to help put Ontario’s bail system back on track, including revising the Crown Policy Manual, expanding the Bail Verification and Supervision Program and extending the use of “Bail Vettor” Crown Counsel,” explained Keast. “We were very pleased to see these ideas reflected in the government’s Plan, and look forward to working closely with the Ministry of the Attorney General on this transformative effort.”

Despite the promising proposed changes, JHSO notes the challenges that lie ahead. “It’s taken a long time for the system to deteriorate to its present state, and things won’t change overnight” says Keast. “Solving Ontario’s bail problems will require a sustained effort from the government and support from key decision-makers in the system. These initiatives need to be thoroughly evaluated over time to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness. They should also be accompanied by an educational campaign to ensure widespread acceptance.”

The Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development at the John Howard Society of Ontario advances the organization's mission of effective, just and humane responses to crime and its causes by engaging in research, policy analysis, public education and program evaluation on behalf of our 19 local offices.

For more information, please contact:

Michelle Keast
Director
Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development
John Howard Society of Ontario
416.408.4282 ext. 234
mkeast@johnhoward.on.ca

[@ReducingCrime](#)
www.johnhoward.on.ca