



# SUBMISSION

# 2022 Pre-Budget Submission



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Centre of Research & Policy

# John Howard Society of Ontario

## Centre of Research & Policy

T: 416-408-4282

W: [www.johnhoward.on.ca](http://www.johnhoward.on.ca)

@jhsontario

## About the John Howard Society of Ontario

For more than 90 years, we've worked to keep the humanity in justice.

Today we continue to build a safer Ontario by supporting the people and communities affected by the criminal justice system. Our 19 local offices deliver more than 80 evidence-based programs and services focused on prevention, intervention and re-integration across the province. These range from helping youth develop the life skills that will let them achieve their full potential, to helping families navigate issues of criminal justice, to providing job training for those leaving incarceration so they can contribute to their community in a meaningful way. We promote practical, equitable policies while raising awareness of the root causes of crime and calling on Ontarians to share responsibility for addressing them. Within the system itself, we advocate for the fair treatment of every individual. Each year, our work impacts the lives of more than 100,000 Ontarians.

## Introduction

Please accept this document as the submission of the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) to the 2022 pre-budget consultations of the Ministry of Finance.

We want to acknowledge the strong leadership of this government in continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are encouraged by the government's efforts to address the needs of justice involved populations through Ministry of Solicitor General initiatives like the community reintegration strategy and the nurse practitioner program, and are pleased to participate in consultations and collaborate wherever possible to ensure Ontarians are receiving needed supports and services.

As we head into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains evident that vulnerable Ontarians continue to face additional risks associated with COVID-19 and are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic – just as they were at heightened risk of marginalization and poorer health outcomes prior to the pandemic. Justice-involved populations are among the most vulnerable as they have higher rates of chronic and acute health conditions, often face lack of employment and precarious housing and are often exposed to outbreaks in congregate settings like prisons and shelters. Our submissions focus on opportunities to reduce the overcrowding inside correctional facilities and ensure that individuals returning to community are provided with the supports and services required for a successful reintegration and to ensure they are able to follow public health guidelines. Reducing the burden on correctional facilities and investing in community-based services and programs results in cost savings to the province, better outcomes for individuals and safer communities overall.

## Bail and Remand

Congregate settings pose additional risks and challenges in the context of a global pandemic. Reducing the population inside correctional facilities was identified early on in the pandemic as an important step in combatting the spread of COVID-19 and remains an important part of the ongoing COVID-19 response. The remand population represents the majority of the population in Ontario's provincial correctional institutions and alternatives to pre-trial detention can ease the burden on correctional institutions and promote the health and safety of staff, prisoners and the greater community. The global pandemic and the increased risks posed by settings COVID-19 has emphasized the importance of reducing remand populations to prevent correctional institutions from becoming outbreak sites. Investing in alternatives to pre-trial detention also results in cost savings as community-based options are significantly less costly than incarceration.

We are encouraged by the government's recognition of the overcrowding issue inside provincial correctional facilities and initiatives designed to target this issue. Initiatives like the pre-charge consultation pilot project and the bail vettor initiative<sup>1</sup> are positive steps towards reducing the burden on the court system and correctional facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (AGO). 2021 Annual Follow-Up on Value-for-Money Audits. Adult Correctional Institutions: Follow up Report. Toronto, Ontario: Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. Retrieved from: [https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/1-14AdultCorrections\\_en21.pdf](https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/1-14AdultCorrections_en21.pdf)

In order to support the government's efforts to reduce overcrowding inside Ontario's correctional facilities, we recommend investments in the following:

- **Bail Verification and Supervision Programs**  
Bail Verification and Supervision Programs (BVSP) offer community-based bail supervision at low costs with demonstrated success at ensuring that accused attend court hearings and adhere to bail conditions. BVSP ensures that low risk individuals are not held in pre-trial detention thereby avoiding the negative impacts of incarceration on the client, including potential loss of housing and employment, and saving the province in both court and corrections costs. Enhanced funding to BVSP programs across the province would help reduce remand stays and contribute to reductions in overcrowding at correctional institutions. A greater emphasis on police referrals to BVSP could also avoid unnecessary stays in detention. In addition, since BVSP is run by community-based agencies like JHS, they are able to connect clients with additional programming, services and supports to address risk factors and needs of the client.
- **Residential bail programs in the province**  
Individuals without a fixed address or who have other "no contact" orders often face prolonged and unnecessary detention. Community based options that provide supervision and supports would keep more individuals out of correctional institutions, ensure their needs and risk factors are addressed and save the province money while also enhancing community safety. JHS currently operates Ministry of Attorney General (MAG) – funded bail beds in Thunder Bay and Ottawa. These programs have proven successful as the beds are almost always full and the residences have supported many clients for prolonged stays, saving the province money in what would otherwise be extended stays in remand facilities. JHS would be pleased to engage in discussions with MAG on how to expand these bail beds across the province and pilot a project providing bail beds for higher risk populations like individuals charged with gang and organized crime related offenses. A model with more intensive staffing levels and supports would provide an effective alternative to incarceration in provincial correctional facilities.

These alternatives to remand would keep more people out of correctional facilities thereby reducing costs to the province and enhancing community safety, particularly in the context of COVID-19 and the risks associated with overcrowded congregate settings.

## **Community Reintegration**

JHSO lauds the government on their commitment to enhancing community reintegration in the province and appreciates the opportunity to provide input in the process. We are very encouraged by the recent Ministry of Solicitor General announcement of 25 new community reintegration officers in Ontario who will provide support to individuals with high risk and high needs leaving correctional institutions. We are happy to support community reintegration efforts and look forward to continued and enhanced partnerships between JHS offices and staff at institutional facilities, to ensure greater coordination and stabilization of returning citizens post-release.

One of the key challenges to successful community reintegration is a lack of housing options for individuals leaving correctional institutions. Without a safe and supportive place of residence, an

individual is not able to comply with public health guidelines or their conditions of release, and cannot successfully access primary health care or secure stable employment.

Justice-involved populations often face higher incidences of homelessness due to loss of income and inability to pay rent or mortgage payments, higher rates of complex mental health and addictions and the barriers associated with having a criminal record. Pre-COVID-19, it was very difficult for individuals leaving correctional facilities to access supportive housing, but the pandemic has exacerbated the situation.

JHSO suggests the following to support community reintegration efforts:

- Invest in dedicated supportive housing for justice involved populations  
Funding should be directed towards a range of supportive housing facilities and rent supplements targeted at individuals recently released from provincial correctional institutions. Supportive housing options should be inclusive of mental health and addictions needs, as well as the specific needs of Indigenous and racialized communities who are overrepresented in corrections and often face compounding issues upon release in the community. Supportive housing programs should adopt the Housing First approach in which housing is prioritized and is not barred for individuals with mental health or addictions issues or other complex needs.
- Invest in community service providers who support individuals recently released from corrections  
One of the goals of the Ministry of Solicitor General's Community Reintegration Strategy appears to be increased coordination between community and corrections. Increased collaboration between the institutional facilities and community-based service providers is a much needed and welcomed development but will likely require additional investments for community organizations to meet the increased volume of clients resulting from greater referrals from community reintegration officers and institutions. Additional funding and resources to the community-based service providers are necessary to allow expansion of the community service sector in order to meet the increased demand and ensure that individuals leaving Ontario's correctional institutions are given the support and programming required for successful re-entry.

Thank you for reviewing our submission. We would be pleased to discuss further and answer any questions you may have.