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NEW REPORT PROVIDES BLUEPRINT TO FIX ONTARIO'S BAIL SYSTEM

90% of Law Enforcement, Legal Professionals and Community Providers Agree More Community-Based Bail Supervision Program Key to Building Safer Communities, Reducing Pressures on System

TORONTO – October 9, 2025. On the eve of expected federal bail reform legislation, a new landmark report by the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) outlines common sense changes that are under provincial jurisdiction, and backed by law enforcement, legal professionals and community providers, to strengthen Ontario's bail system.

The new report, entitled *Finding Common Ground: Cross-sector solutions to modernize Ontario's bail system* found overwhelming support for enhanced community-based supervision and community-based approaches to crime prevention with 90% of 106 survey respondents from across the province agreeing that the Bail Verification and Supervision Program (BVSP) and investments in long-term community safety would improve the bail system and reduce system pressures. The Ministry of the Attorney General-funded BVSP is delivered by community agencies that provide bail supervision and case management to individuals who are not considered high-risk and who might otherwise be denied bail for lacking a surety or other forms of assistance. Research supports the value of BVSPs as effective and safe alternatives to pre-trial detention – not only offering bail monitoring but also additional services that address criminogenic risk.

Through informed, collaborative dialogue, the new report uncovers interdisciplinary consensus on a path forward that would reduce pressures on the courts and correctional systems in Ontario by strengthening the pathways to care and support for individuals impacted by poverty, mental health challenges, and addictions. Increasing inter-agency collaboration, and expanding residential bail beds to more communities would additionally help divert individuals who need mental health or other supports from the system, while freeing up court and corrections resources to focus on those posing serious risk to the community.

"Ontario's bail system is no longer serving the purposes it was designed for," said Christin Cullen, Chief Executive Officer of JHSO. "Instead of enhancing community safety, it has become crushed under the weight of processing people who are unhoused, low-income or struggling with their mental health – and holding them in custody at enormous human and financial cost.

416 408-4282

info@johnhoward.on.ca

342 Queen Street East
Toronto, ON M5A 1S8





The report makes it clear what we need to do to fix it – invest in strengthened community supervision supports and cross-sector collaboration so the bail system can once again work as it should.”

The report recommends the following actions and investments to allow the system to focus its finite resources on serious cases as it was designed to do, while at the same time enhancing public safety.

- Better funding and utilization of Ontario’s Bail Programs:

Bail Verification and Supervision Programs (BVSPS) are delivered effectively by community-based agencies across Ontario, while Residential Bail Bed programs reduce pretrial detention pressures and lead to more successful monitoring and individual outcomes. But there are only a handful of sites in Ontario offering Bail Beds, and BVSPs are underfunded, especially for rural and remote catchments. Better funding and utilization of both will reduce court and remand pressures and enhance bail outcomes.

- Enhance inter-agency collaboration

Improved linkages between police, courts and social services such as housing providers, backed by a “whole of government” approach, would address the social determinants of crime and enhance public safety.

- Improve court efficiencies

The province should expand specialized courts to support and inform the bail adjudication process and promote the use of judicial referral hearings to reduce unnecessary proceedings for Administration of Justice offences, streamline legal processes, alleviate pressure on courts and better reflect social realities faced by marginalized groups.

“The research shows that everyone involved in the system – from police to lawyers to social workers and service providers – believes we can reduce pretrial detention, keep communities safe, and support vulnerable individuals by investing in proven bail programs and community supports,” concluded Safiyah Husein, a lead author of the report and JHSO’s Director of Policy. “At a time when there are cries for bail reform, we must seize the opportunity to put common sense solutions in place that are proven to both support individuals and build safer communities, helping police and courts focus on violent and serious cases.”



Quotes

“Remand was not intended to be used to cope with people who are homeless, with mental health challenges, or who are living in poverty. This research points to practical solutions that would allow the remand system to re-focus on serious cases. It’s essential reading for anyone who wants a serious discussion about bail reform.” – Elizabeth McIsaac, President of Maytree

“Sureties are not always people that you can necessarily rely on to report when people are not doing as they’re supposed to be doing. But if we have supervision programs where we have professionals in this space that know how to, you know, what the expectations are and can also refer to services and other things like that where a surety may not be able to do that, I think that is it. It only makes sense.” - Police Service Member, Central Region

“People with [mental health]/addictions and/or no address can no longer find a shelter bed and often end up re-offending, missing court or not complying with release conditions which increases the number of matters in bail court on administration of justice charges.” – Community Agency Staff, Central Ontario

“There are [some] options for bail for those that are poor and unhoused. Clearly there needs to be more money invested in these options.” - Police Service Member, Eastern Region

JHSO gratefully acknowledges its funding from [Maytree](#), which made the Re:thinking Justice series possible.

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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 local offices span the province and deliver more than 80 evidence-based programs and services focused on prevention, intervention and reintegration across the province. We promote practical, equitable policies while raising awareness of the root causes of crime and calling on Ontarians to share responsibility for addressing them. To learn more, please visit www.johnhoward.on.ca.

For more information, please contact:

Jacqueline Tasca

jtasca@johnhoward.on.ca

Phone: 416-408-4282 Ext 224

