

For Immediate Release

New mandatory drug sentences taking effect November 9th

“The mandatory minimum sentences for a number of new drug related offences, contained in the federal government’s omnibus crime bill will take effect on Friday, November 9th, 2012” John Hutton, Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Manitoba observed. “These changes will cause a further explosion in the population of Manitoba provincial jails at a time when the system is already facing an overcrowding crisis.”

Hutton pointed out that since 1999 the Manitoba government has embarked on an unprecedented program of jail expansion resulting in almost 1000 new jail cells, built or currently under construction and even that hasn’t come close to addressing the needs of a system where jail populations are increasing at the rate of about 400 inmates from one year to the next.

“The so-called ‘tough on crime approach’ is creating ‘hallway corrections’”, Hutton noted. Inmates are double and triple bunked, housed on the floor of gymnasiums, put in interview rooms, and former class rooms and employment training facilities. Not only is this inhumane, over-crowded jail conditions increases the likelihood of recidivism, leading to more crime in future. It also creates very dangerous conditions inside the correctional centres for inmates and staff alike.”

“It’s irresponsible for the federal government to implement provisions which increase the number of people held in jails without considering the capacity of the provinces to absorb so many more inmates in their correctional centres. Nor should Canadians be forced to pay for longer sentences, when there is ample evidence to show these measures do little or nothing to reduce crime.” Hutton concluded.

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