

For Immediate Release
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Federal government to throw millions of Canadians under the Omnibus

Bill C-10, currently being rushed through parliament will delay or outright deny pardons to millions of Canadians trying to move forward and put their criminal pasts behind them. Chris Courchene, a young Aboriginal man from Winnipeg who left gang-life and has been living crime free for several years sees Bill C-10 as a major obstacle about to be put in his path. “I would not be able to get a pardon – ever, if this bill passes”, Courchene told a press conference on Parliament Hill, “and this will impact my ability to support my family.”

“My goal is to finish my apprenticeship as a carpenter and get hired by Manitoba Hydro, but without a pardon I can’t do this”, Courchene stated. “Most large employers – not just Hydro, won’t hire someone with a record even when someone has been crime free for years. I did the crime, I did the time, and now that I am trying to lead a responsible life and look after my family the government wants to prevent me from earning a decent wage.”

Nor is Courchene an isolated case. “Over 3 million Canadians have a criminal record for which they have not been pardoned” observed John Hutton, Executive Director of JHS Manitoba. “Bill C-10 would adversely affect the vast majority of these individuals, by either doubling the waiting periods for pardons or taking pardons away altogether. “

“Those in Quebec will have an even tougher time as laws there make it impossible for someone with a criminal record to get insurance for their house, effectively making it impossible for them to ever own a house, unless they can get a pardon,” observed Jean-Claude Bernheim, a criminologist from Quebec, addressing media in French. “A good job and a house, are two powerful incentives for someone to go ‘straight’” Bernheim said, “but both these incentives could be lost because of the new Legislation.”

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For more information contact
John Hutton, Executive Director, John Howard Society of Manitoba
204-612-4570

Bill C-10 Backgrounder Regarding Pardons

As proposed, the omnibus bill would double the waiting period for most of those wanting to get a pardon, and make it impossible for anyone with more than three indictable offences to get a pardon, ever. Given that under the current system, at least 96% of those receiving a pardon never re-offend there is no need to change the rules. In doing so the government is placing further obstacles in the path of those who are trying to live responsible, crime free lives. Taking away the prospect of a pardon – ever, would be a major blow to hundreds of thousands of Canadians, who would be penalized in terms of finding employment, advancing their career and even volunteering in their child's school as a result.

Chris Courchene joined a gang at the age of 11 and spent several years in and out of custody as a youth and young adult. He is now living crime free and needs a pardon in order to complete his apprenticeship and support his family as a tradesperson. He would not be eligible for a pardon, should this legislation pass.

None of the proposals related to pardons in the omnibus bill have any direct benefit to victims. For example there is no voice or role for the victim in the pardon granting process proposed. The current law already contains a provision that requires the offender to show that getting a pardon would be in the public interest and anyone serving a life sentence is already prevented from getting a pardon.

Denying a pardon to anyone who has even a single sex conviction which the omnibus would do in a number of situations is completely unnecessary from a safety perspective. Even with a pardon, *under the current rules* anyone seeking to work or volunteer with children or other vulnerable persons will be red-flagged during a criminal record check if the offence was sexual in nature.