

#OFOVCCOMMUNITY NEWSLETTER



SPRING 2024

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2 | Events and Engagements
- 3 | *Online Harms Act* (Bill C-63)
- 4 | Investigation into the experiences of survivors of sexual assault
- 4 | Worthy of Information and Respect
- 4 | Bill C-332 on controlling or coercive conduct
- 5 | Highlighting Successes in our Community
- 5 | Looking Ahead

The Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime acknowledges that our office, located in Ottawa, is on the unceded, unsurrendered Territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation whose presence here reaches back to time immemorial.

Welcome back #OFOVCCommunity!

It's been a whirlwind of activity these past few months. From January 1 to April 30, 2024, our Office actioned 490 files including victim complaints, requests for information, and referrals to victim-serving agencies across Canada. That's a 101.6% increase or twice the volume from last year!

Throughout these pages, we share updates on our ongoing initiatives, insights into the challenges and triumphs faced by victims, and stories of success within our community.

This newsletter is for you—survivors and victims of crime, your families, our partners and stakeholders, and all who support and impact the lives of survivors. We invite you to engage with us to help guide our work. Your feedback, experiences, and insights are essential as we strive to serve you better and advocate for those who have been affected by crime.

Heard. Respected. **VICTIMS FIRST.**
Écoutées. Respectées. **LES VICTIMES D'ABORD.**



Events and Engagement

In our continuous journey to advocate for justice and support across various communities, the past few months have yielded significant moments of collaboration, learning, and engagement. Here is a glimpse into the impactful events and meetings we have participated in:

January 18: We facilitated a meeting between Indigenous complainants and Correctional Service Canada (CSC)'s Deputy Commissioner for Indigenous Corrections, laying the groundwork for more inclusive and understanding corrections practices.

January 24 and April 24: The Ombudsperson took part in the Federal Ombuds Meeting alongside other Governor-in-Council appointees identified as federal Ombuds for defence, veterans, victims, corrections, procurement, taxation, and responsible enterprise, working towards a united front in our advocacy efforts.

January 30: The Ombudsperson joined a staff meeting of Yukon Victim Services, which included providers of independent legal advice and victim services from across the Territory, to discuss and share resources and strategies for supporting victims effectively.

February 6: We convened a virtual meeting between the Ontario Provincial Police in the Serious Fraud Office and multiple Ontario Crown Counsel with the Ministry of the Attorney General for the Financial Crimes Unit, focusing on the barriers to accessing restitution and exploring avenues for improvement.

February 26: We engaged in a virtual discussion with Ontario 211, a social and community services assistance phone line, on emerging practices in reporting hate crimes, aiming to enhance our response strategies and support systems for victims.

March 12: We presented to Université de Montréal victimology students about the mandate, role, and work of the Office.

March 13: The Ombudsperson had a productive meeting with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Honourable Arif Virani, discussing challenges in the criminal justice system, our priorities and how to reinforce our mission to advocate for victims' rights and services.



Image of Dr. Benjamin Roebuck and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Honourable Arif Virani.

March 15: The Ombudsperson delivered a virtual lecture to RV University in India on victimology and victim justice.

March 19 to 22: The Ombudsperson and our Senior Policy Advisor, Hoori Hamboyan, attended a non-governmental organization event at the United Nations Conference on the Status of Women in New York City. They presented on the gendered costs of unenforced victim rights for survivors of sexual assault.

March 25: Members of OFOVC's intake team spoke to victimology students at Ottawa's Algonquin College about the mandate, role, and work of the Office.



Image of Dr. Benjamin Roebuck and Hoori Hamboyan at the United Nations Conference on the Status of Women in New York City.

March 27: The OFOVC engaged in a dialogue with the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, representing an exciting step towards more international cooperation in the realm of victim advocacy, in addition to enriching our perspective and strategies.

April 5: The Office engaged with the Ontario Native Women's Association and their Courage for Change - Anti-Human Trafficking Program. We discussed supporting survivors through meaningful initiatives.



Poster for RV University's lecture on victimology and victim justice.



Image of meeting between the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales and Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime.

The Ombudsperson also acted as a special advisor to the Correctional Service of Canada's Multidisciplinary Working Committee on Victim Services. Its final report was released in February of 2024, highlighting a range of issues relating to victims, the importance of a victim-centred approach and ways to minimize or eliminate barriers for victims to access their rights under the Canadian Victim Bill of Rights.

Dr. Roebuck also participated in the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Victims of Crime, and the Pacific Region's Victim Advisory Committee meeting.

Our Office took part in consultations on the Canadian Benefit for Parents of Young Victims of Crime delivered by Employment and Social Development Canada, and consulted with a number of academics and community organizations on the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and hate crimes.

In January, our Policy Team Lead, Mariam Musse, travelled to London, Ontario, to observe the sentencing hearings for the offender found guilty of killing Salman Afzaa, his wife, Madiha Salman, their daughter Yumna, and grandmother, Talat Afzaal. She listened to all the victim impact statements, which described the impact the offender's actions had on the direct victims, and the greater London community. This will inform our Office's special study on hate crime.

These past few months, our team has also met with:

- Public Safety Stakeholders: Correctional Service Canada (CSC) Victim Services, Parole Board of Canada (PBC) Policy, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Department of Justice: Deputy Minister, Minister's Office, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister (SADM) Policy Sector, Director General Policy Sector, and Policy Centre for Victim Issues
- Indigenous Services Canada gender-based violence sector on the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence
- Office of the Correctional Investigator
- Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism
- Canada's Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia,
- Military Police Complaints Commission of Canada
- Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre of the Canadian Armed Forces
- Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner
- City of Toronto Ombudsman
- National Association of Women and the Law
- Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Centre
- Ontario Office for Victims of Crime
- Living Works Education
- Canadian Centre for Child Protection
- Gymnasts for Change Canada

Online Harms Act (Bill C-63)

On February 26, the Government tabled a bill aimed at better protecting Canadians from online hate and violence. Read the Ombudsperson's recently published statement on the new proposed legislation.

“ *I urge all of Canada's elected and appointed officials to collaborate. The cost of inaction is high.*

-Dr. Benjamin Roebuck

Systemic Investigation into the Experiences of Survivors of Sexual Assault

In March, our Office announced the launch of a systemic investigation on the experiences of survivors of sexual assault within the Canadian criminal justice system. We informed key government officials about this major undertaking that will highlight critical shortcomings and hopefully drive urgent reforms across the entire system. The OFOVC's initiative has been brought to the attention of the Ministers of Justice, Public Safety, Women and Gender Equality and Youth, National Defence, as well as the Prime Minister of Canada.

The investigation will cover survivors' interactions with law enforcement and the justice system from the point of initial contact through to post-sentencing. So far, the response from survivors and people who wish to contribute has been overwhelming.

Sunny Marriner, a highly respected and leading expert in criminal justice system responses to sexual violence, has agreed to chair a new Expert Advisory Circle to support the investigation.

We anticipate releasing our final report in summer/fall of 2025 which will provide actionable recommendations to integrate a trauma-informed and victim-centred approach in the criminal justice system, marking a pivotal step towards meaningful reform.

The Office will also launch anonymous public consultations this summer and all details will be made available on our website at www.victimfirst.gc.ca. Anyone wishing to contribute to our investigation can write to us at victimfirst@ombud.gc.ca.

Worthy of Information and Respect:

Improving Support for Victims of Crime: A Response to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (JUST)

We were pleased to present our formal response to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights' "Improving Support for Victims of Crime" report. Our feedback, titled "Worthy of Information and Respect" is informed by the voices and experiences of victims of crime across Canada, conversations with stakeholders and advocates, and consultations with our Academic Advisory Circle and Frontline Service Provider Advisory Circle.

Our recommendations propose a broadening of perspective; one that includes the victim's lens throughout the criminal justice process. Our work is founded upon the objectives of the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* (CVBR), guaranteeing victims' rights to information, protection, participation, to seek restitution, and to file a complaint.

The Ombudsperson wrote a letter to the Minister of Justice, the Honourable Arif Virani, informing him of our submission. We hope Parliament will listen and act. This is an opportunity to lead with compassion.

An Act to Amend the *Criminal Code* (controlling or coercive conduct) (Bill C-332)



Image of Dr. Benjamin Roebuck appearing before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to speak on Bill-C-332.

The Ombudsperson, Dr. Roebuck, appeared in front of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to speak on Bill-C-332, to share his views on the impact of controlling or coercive conduct and how it links to intimate partner violence, an ongoing epidemic. Bill C-332 would criminalize repeat or continuous patterns of coercive control, providing more tools for police to intervene in patterns of abuse. You can read his remarks [here](#).

Highlighting Successes in our Community

IMIRT App

Tawheed Community Centre, the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation launched the Islamophobia-Motivated Incident Reporting Tool (IMIRT) app. Victims can report incidents and find helpful resources.

iHeal App



Poster for iHeal app.

The iHEAL app, developed by researchers at Western University, the University of British Columbia and the University of New Brunswick, provides personalized information to women who have experienced abuse. It is private, secure, and free.

We are eager to shine a light on the amazing work of victim advocates and service providers. We'd love to hear from you! This is an open invitation to share your journey, challenges, and triumphs with us. Let's celebrate your achievements and inspire others by featuring your work in our next newsletter.



Image of IMIRT app.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, our Office will focus on our investigation on the experiences of survivors of sexual assault in Canada and conduct a review into hate crimes and hate-related incidents.

The Office plans to continue meeting with the Academic and Frontline Service Providers Advisory Circles and reconvene its Indigenous Advisory Circle.

We are pleased to announce that we are working to secure a new case management system for our Intake team that will enhance our data collection processes, enabling us to capture and organize information more efficiently and accurately. Part of our mandate is to identify emerging systemic issues, and this technology will help improve our services and support to clients.

As part of our strategic planning, we identified four key priorities to guide our efforts in the coming year: improve victims' rights, foster greater multilateral collaboration supporting victims' needs, create an inclusive and diverse employee-centric work culture, and lastly, embrace new ways of working. These planning efforts also help us increase efficiency, especially in these times of increased demands for victim and survivor support.

Let's Stay Connected.

Follow us on social media for updates about our office, helpful resources, and information.

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