



Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Comité permanent de la justice et des droits de la personne

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🕒 (1140)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC)): We'll call the meeting to order, this being the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Today we're continuing our study on Bill C-26, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code. We do have some witnesses before us today.

Just before we start, I'll just remind the committee that on Thursday we're going to deal with Mr. Comartin's Bill C-290, and I believe that we'll be able to—he has one witness. We'll be able to deal with that witness and do the clause-by-clause on Thursday. Hopefully we can finish that bill off and then we're going to deal with a couple of groups that are going to come before us and hopefully we can finalize the organized crime study.

Today, we have three witnesses before us, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Preston, and Mr. Scholten.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: I want to thank you all for being here today. We appreciate your assistance as we look at this legislation. You bring a variety of perspectives, so that's very helpful.

I wanted to follow up on what my colleague, Monsieur Jacob, was talking about, so I'm directing these more towards you, Mr. Scholten.

As I understand it, the Canadian Convenience Stores Association, I believe you said, represents over 25,000 stores. I think you called them C-stores. That's a new term for me, but it makes it a little easier to say. Of course, these are located in every community of Canada, looking after Canadian's daily needs.

I'm interested in understanding a little more of the profile of your organization's members. Would they include C-stores that are, for instance, what we would call a corner store, standing independently on its own, as well as a store that might be found in a mall, for instance?

🕒 (1235)

Mr. Alex Scholten: Yes, we would cover all stores that would be offering convenience items. That would include everything from a corner store to a stand-alone store to some of the small retail outlets you'd see in a shopping mall.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Then, would I be correct in assuming that there might be quite a different profile in terms of the number of employees those stores might have? For instance, I'm thinking of corner stores in my community at home, where often there's just one or two people there and sometimes, particularly on a night shift, if they're open 24 hours, there would only be one person in the store. Is that correct?

Mr. Alex Scholten: It would depend on the nature of the business and what the owner of that business dictated as being necessary. The typical age is 17 to 35. The late-night practices would depend on a business by business basis. We have training for our retail members and the late hours and how to act in the safest manner possible. We have developed materials that would help them to be able to determine what was best for their situation. We have also worked very closely with the B.C. government on some new work-safe provisions dealing with late-night practices as well so that the owners of the stores are much more aware of situations that could arise and how to protect their staff and customers.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Would it be fair for me to assume that some of your organization's members, for instance, wouldn't have the capacity or the size to have security guards there, it would be the owner-operator or their employee that's running things?

Mr. Alex Scholten: Yes that would be absolutely fair. With profit margins or 1% to 1.5% there is no money to hire security guards or have extra staffing. We're at a very cost-efficient operating basis.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Do you feel that the changes our government is proposing would give your members some more confidence in how to deal with criminality when they are victimized or presented with it in their store?

Mr. Alex Scholten: Absolutely. It creates a situation where we have more flexibility in how we can protect our property by not simply being able to act while a crime is being committed but in a reasonable time period afterwards. That definitely gives our members much more flexibility and we'd very much encourage that.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: I assume as well that part of your training that you're talking about, our instructions would be to continue to tell those who might be on the front-line in the stores that they need to contact law enforcement in whatever way they can at the earliest time possible. Would that be correct?

Mr. Alex Scholten: That is absolutely correct. Our members first and foremost want to make sure that they're not putting themselves or they customers and employees in harm's way. Unfortunately the reality of the situation is they often have to.

I would note in the case of Mr. Chen the day before this incident came up in his testimony he outlined the fact that he had a shoplifter that was caught in the act and they called police immediately and waited four hours for the police to show up at their site. Again, just because of the priority of the situation and the priority level of the crime that gives you an idea of what we as retailers go through on a day-to-day basis. So the laws that we're talking about would give us much more flexibility but realizing that we always want the police to be doing the law enforcement and not us. We can help them by having that flexibility.

The Chair: Thank you.