



Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

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Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Good morning, Minister.

Mr. Saunders, thank you for being with us today.

My questions are around the additional funding for the court's administration service, Minister. I noted with interest that part of that is a request for further crown witness coordinators. It's my understanding that they operate primarily in the north, and I believe based in Yellowknife, Inuvik, Whitehorse and Iqaluit, but they often travel with the Circuit Court. I'm just wondering if you could tell us what the work is that they do, why they're important to prosecution, and to the witnesses and victims of crimes.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: As you know, Ms. Findlay, the Government of Canada has a special responsibility with respect to justice in the territories, and again as part of that, the coordination and the facilitation of trials, the calling of witnesses, the facilitation of getting witnesses before the court is a big challenge.

I hear this in my discussions with my territorial counterparts in terms of all aspects of the judicial system, whether they're judicial hearings, there are great, for instance, travel costs in terms of moving judges and court officials, and coordinating witnesses. It seems to me that we have a responsibility in terms of facilitating the administration of justice to be sensitive to that and recognize the particular challenges that exist within our territories. It's important for the administration of justice that justice be available in a way that facilitates the fair hearing of a case, and so this is what takes place, and inevitably it costs more money than if you're talking about a court appearance here in downtown Ottawa.

That being said, it's important that we do that, and so when I see requests from the court administration services with respect to costs for court reporting, transcripts, translation services, I'm very empathetic to that, because I know this is an important aspect of that. With respect to the supplementary estimates, there are the four courts that I've identified, but of course the issue is much greater than that, because this, too, is part of facilitating justice across this country. Again, we have a particular responsibility with respect to the territories, and so we take that very seriously.

What you have before you here is a very reasonable, and, in my opinion, modest request for additional sums under the supplementary Bs, and I hope that it will get the support of this committee.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Thank you.

I also understand under those requests there's an area against money laundering of proceeds of crime and the financing of terrorist activities. Of course I know that disrupting the enterprise of organized crime is of importance to this government. In looking at the background materials I see that our anti-money laundering regime was established in 2000 and then the anti-terrorist financing added in 2001. There seems to be a number of partners involved in this. I'm wondering if you could just explain a little more to us why this is important and how it is that these various agencies and organizations work together on this difficult issue.

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Hon. Rob Nicholson: As I made the case before this committee these types of prosecutions are sophisticated and they're becoming more sophisticated. It's absolutely vital that all those elements within the criminal justice system for law enforcement cooperate, that there is communication between all those involved with this. Now the public prosecution services part of what they do is coordinating, assisting, and advising with respect to these complex crimes. It seems to me this is only reasonable in terms of what we see as the development within criminal organizations. I pointed this out many times over the past that many of these crimes are not one-off's, as one individual who has decided to do something. They are sophisticated operations part of organized crime. So the measures taken against those organizations have to be developing, they have to be sophisticated as well. So there is a role to play with respect to the public prosecutions in the assistance and the advice of that. One aspect of that, and it is contained within these, is the website that will help coordinate this activity.

We know that the criminal organizations are using sophisticated communication systems and we can't be on the outside looking in. We have to be a part of this as well. So when I see a request for something like that as I've indicated it definitely has my attention, and gets my support because it makes sense that we have to do what we can. We can't have law enforcement agencies anywhere in this country operating as what they used to call silos that they have to work with each other because ultimately we all have a stake in ensuring that these individuals who get involved with this type of crime are brought to justice and that there is better security for Canadians.

Again, that is one of the aspects of the supplemental Bs and I hope this gets the support of all the members of the committee.