

MP backs tough crime bill

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The name of the federal government's new, all encompassing crime bill tabled this week speaks for itself, said Delta-Richmond East MP Kerry-Lynne Findlay.

"We believe that we received a strong mandate in the last election to continue to make our streets and communities safe," Findlay said from Ottawa on Tuesday (Sept. 20). "Hence the name of it (bill) Safe Streets and Communities Act."

Findlay, who is Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, said it entails nine bills that have been introduced before, but because of a minority parliament, did not get through all the processes needed to become law.

One of the leading changes being sought is an increase of mandatory minimum sentencing for crimes involving cases related to drugs, sex and violence.

"People look to the legislature to create a sense of parameters for judges, although they have a great deal of discretion when it comes to sentencing," she said. "But we're looked upon to look at maximum as well as minimum sentencing."

With the prospect of longer sentences as a result, Findlay was asked if the justice and corrections systems will receive increased funding to deal with the possibility of greater case loads.

"The time to get through the court system is a complaint we hear often, but if you have more certainty of sentencing one would think that would lead to less backlog in the courts where you have a greater understanding within the community of the penalties involved if one is associated with criminal behaviour," she said.

One of the new portions of the act specifically targets organized crime for the production and possession of drugs for the purposes of trafficking.

"It's not aimed at the user, it's aimed at drug traffickers," Findlay said.

Stiffer penalties for violent and repeat young offenders are also on the list.

"It's taking action to protect families and hold criminals accountable," she said. "It's particularly looking at the victimization of children, as well as drug trafficking.

"It certainly gives the courts and law enforcement the tools they need to treat these things seriously so that where there is a rise in crime they can deal with it more effectively."

One of the criticisms of the bill points to the drop in crime across the country. According to Statistics Canada, crime was down five per cent in 2010.

Asked whether the federal government should be concentrating on the economy rather than upping the war against crime, Findlay said, "As far as (crime) statistics are concerned, although one can see they appear to show a reduction in crime it's not across the board. There is reduction in certain crimes, other crime is up. And other crime remains unreported. So, it's not really accurate to say that crime is down and this is not necessary.

"We are (also) the party that is most prudent fiscally, and we stand by that record. So, there's no backing off that as a primary focus."

Findlay added the whole package is aimed at making communities safer by making those convicted of crime more accountable, making the sentences more consistent across the country.

While no hard figures have been attached to the omnibus bill, failure to proceed with the changes would be a mistake, Findlay said.

"There have been a lot of questions about the cost, and I guess the easiest way to answer that would be the cost of crime is such a huge number that the cost of trying to combat it pales in comparison," she said.