

Tory bill proposes violent youth be tried as adults

CTV.ca News Staff

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If the Conservative government has its way, more young offenders would be tried as adults and people would be charged with identity theft before even committing a crime.

Those are just two of the implications in a series of new laws introduced today by the federal Tories.

The proposed legislation tackles a slew of hot-button issues including drugs, gun crime, identity theft and young offenders.

The government introduced their Crime Bill by starting off with proposed changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

These are the key proponents of their proposal:

- Tougher sentences
- Allowing for pre-trial detention
- Allow courts to consider deterrence and denunciation as objectives of youth sentences

Justice Minister Rob Nicholson said young offenders need to be held accountable when they commit violent crimes.

"These amendments to the Youth Criminal Justice Act are intended to help hold young lawbreakers accountable to their victims and their community, and instill within them a sense of responsibility for their delinquent or criminal behaviour," he said.

The minister also said the new legislation would be tougher on bail conditions for repeat offenders or youth accused of committing violent crimes.

Nicholson also said there will be a more comprehensive review of the Youth Criminal Justice Act next year.

Critics were hesitant to applaud the move.

Yvon Godin, the NDP whip, called the move "smoke and mirrors" on CTV's Mike Duffy Live.

"If a youth is dangerous to the people, the judge already has that power. This bill won't change anything," he told the show's host Mike Duffy Monday.

However, Jay Hill, the Conservative Party whip, said a recent commission in Nova Scotia found that law officials feel like they do not have enough power when it comes to young offenders.

"In the opinion of the inquiry, judges do not have sufficient power to ensure proper detention of a violent youth if he does pose a threat to others," he told Duffy.

Liberal whip Karen Redman said the party agrees the Act needs to be re-examined but that they would want to study the Conservative proposal further.

"We certainly do agree that repeat violent offenders need to be looked at," she said.

"A lot of these recommendations seem to be consistent with the report that came out of Nova Scotia," she continued. "We've said all along we're very supportive of that but we do want to make sure that the principles of the Youth Criminal Justice bill are not undermined."

The most controversial piece of legislation will be the one that deals with identity theft.

As it stands now, the criminal code says it is illegal to use someone else's identity to commit a crime. But the Tories want to change the law so that it makes mere possession of someone else's identity a crime.

Joe Comartin, the NDP justice critic, said the government needs to make it illegal to conspire to commit a crime if they want their identity theft legislation hold up in court.

"We know that we have to do more to both prevent and prosecute identity theft," he told the Canadian Press.

"But a blanket prohibition in terms of possession is really, really hard to see that it would survive."

Critics also slammed a new law that would see minimum sentences imposed on people caught possessing or trafficking drugs. They said it would have little impact on the crime rate and would instead result in the overcrowding of prisons.