

SPEAKING NOTES
Mr. Tony Cannavino
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(Please check against delivery)

Good morning. The Canadian Police Association (CPA) welcomes the opportunity to present our submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights with respect to Bill C-22.

The CPA is the national voice for 54,000 police personnel across Canada. Through our 170 affiliates, membership includes police personnel serving in police services from Canada's smallest towns and villages as well as those working in our largest municipal and provincial police services, the RCMP Members Associations, and First Nations police associations.

Protection of Canada's Children has been an issue of paramount concern for the CPA and our members. In this regard, the CPA has long advocated that Parliament increase the Age of Consent from fourteen years of age to sixteen.

The government included a commitment to move forward with this legislation in their justice platform during the last federal election, and we are pleased to see this commitment

being delivered upon. We are also pleased to see that all other parties in the House of Commons have been generally supportive of the principles contained in this Bill.

Canadians also support efforts to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years. In 2002, a POLLARA poll of Canadians revealed that seventy-two percent of those polled agreed with raising the age of consent from fourteen to sixteen.

Canada lags behind most first-world nations in the protection of our children through age of consent provisions. Countries with an age of consent of sixteen or higher include Belgium, Hong Kong, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Most of the states in the United States and Australia have an age of consent of sixteen or higher. Many of these countries also include “similar in age” provisions to address consensual relations between young people of similar age.

The growth of the Internet has significantly increased the availability of child pornography and facilitates attempts by pedophiles to find new victims. Unfortunately, under existing Canadian law, Canada is viewed by some foreign sex predators as a child sex tourism destination. Law enforcement authorities report a growth in the number of

pedophiles who contact young people in Canada through the Internet because of the low age of consent, and then travel here for sexual purposes.

Those who would prey on our children through the internet or other means understand that it is not an offence in Canada for an older person who is not in a position of trust or authority to have consensual sexual relations with a child of fifteen years.

Although Canadian families have the highest per capita internet use in the world, Canada remains well behind other jurisdictions in dealing with the online sexual exploitation of children. According to the Young Canadians in a Wired World survey:

- 99% of youth have reported using the Internet
- 1 in 4 children have had a stranger ask to meet them in person
- 15% of all young Internet users have met - "in person" - at least 1 individual whom they first met on the Internet - of those only 6% were accompanied by a parent or other adult
- 1 in 4 youth have been sent pornography on the Internet by a stranger

Police officers welcome the changes introduced in Bill C-22 as another tool to help protect our children from sexual exploitation by older persons. Bill C-22 sends a message to these predators that Canadian children are no longer open game. The Bill will reinforce the way police investigate child exploitation and provide police with the needed tools to intervene when older persons seek to engage in sexual activity with children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.

The Canadian Police Association recommends that Parliament proceed with swift passage of Bill C-22 to give effect to the amendments contained therein.