

## SECOND READING SPEECH – HON. MICHAEL FERGUSON MP

### *Corrections Amendment (Parole Board) Bill 2015*

Madam Speaker,

I move that the Bill now be read for a second time.

This Bill makes amendments to the *Corrections Act* by providing for a 'victim of crime representative' to be appointed as a member of the Parole Board. The wording of the Bill requires that the 'victim of crime representative' must be a person who has knowledge and experience of victim of crime matters, as well as experience in matters associated with sociology, criminology, penology or medicine. It is not intended or required that the 'victim of crime representative' must have been a victim of crime, but rather that the representative has an understanding of the impact of crime on victims through study and or working with victims of crime. Neither are 'victims of crime' excluded from membership if they have the requisite knowledge and skills required to discharge decision making functions required under the Act.

Madam Speaker, this legislation fulfils the government's election commitment to rebuild essential services as outlined in the *First 100 Days Implementation Plan*. But more importantly, this Bill will give victims of crime a stronger voice by providing for a victim of crime representative to have an active role in decisions made about prisoners' suitability for parole.

The amendments will not result in an increase in the size of the Parole Board but will change the composition of the Parole Board. This means no additional funding will be required to fulfil this election commitment.

Madam Speaker, the Bill also provides for the Deputy Chairperson of the Parole Board to sit in meetings of the Parole Board in the absence of any other member. Currently the Deputy Chairperson may only sit in meetings in the absence of the Chairperson. This will make it easier for the Parole Board to achieve a quorum at its meetings.

Madam Speaker, consultation on the Bill was undertaken with a range of stakeholders including the Parole Board, relevant government agencies and a range of external stakeholders such as the legal fraternity, support services and advocates. Those stakeholders who provided comment were generally supportive of the proposed amendments and had constructive suggestions which are reflected in this Bill.

Madam Speaker, the Bill requires that the 'victim of crime representative' must have experience in matters associated with sociology, criminology, penology or medicine, as well as knowledge and experience of victim of crime matters. This recognises the complex nature of matters which are required to be considered by Parole Board members under the *Corrections Act*, when determining whether to release a prisoner on parole.

Madam Speaker, this has been incorporated to address feedback given by the Chief Psychiatrist, Chief Medical Officer and Beyond Abuse, who support along with the Parole Board, that the victim representative should have relevant professional or academic qualifications or experience.

I also note Madam Speaker, that there are current members of the Parole Board who satisfy the criteria for the 'victim of crime representative' who continue to provide their expertise to the deliberations of the Parole Board. These amendments will ensure that the Parole Board will maintain 'victims of crime' representation into the future.

These amendments will commence on proclamation and can come into effect when there is a vacancy in membership. A rigorous selection process will be then undertaken to ensure that the most suitable person is appointed to represent victims of crime.

I commend the Bill to the House.