First United Church
An Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Canada
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May 1 2019

The Honourable David Lametti PC, MP
Minister of Justice
and Attorney General of Canada
Room 434
Confederation Building
Ottawa ON K1A 0H8

The Honourable Caroline Mulroney, MPP
Attorney General
& Minister of Francophone Affairs
Ministry of the Attorney General
11th floor, 720 Bay Street
Toronto ON M7A 2S9

Dear Attorneys General:

Access to timely justice – A call to continuing action in overcoming criminal trial delays

I am honoured to write to you on behalf of the congregation of First United Church, Ottawa.

My purpose in writing is to urge your personal leadership and Canada’s commitment toward ending the problem of systemic delays in our criminal justice system. More than two years following the case of R. v. Jordan, 2016 SCC 27 together with related contemporaneous decisions of Canada’s Supreme Court, we are concerned that measures toward eliminating delays have not been completed.

It may be useful to understand the context from which I write. A member of our congregation was convicted of historical sexual abuse crimes against a minor, a conviction which was eventually stayed due to unreasonable delays in the criminal justice system, a decision made (R. v. Williamson, 2016 SCC 28) in close proximity to the Jordan decision. As a result, our congregation has invested considerable effort once learning of this person in our midst, to
ensure that the community is safe, and that survivors of abuse in our congregation are well supported. First United is committed to creating a caring and safe environment for all participants, volunteer leaders, and staff involved in First’s programs and activities.

We applaud Canada’s proposed legislative reforms, introduced last March, as a credible step toward making our criminal justice system more efficient. Bill C-75 ("An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts") contains important measures, among them useful restrictions to preliminary inquiries and better judicial case management authority.

Getting to effective timely, criminal justice involves more than legislation, of course. A part of the solution is government resources, including appointment of judges to existing vacancies in superior and provincial courts, as well as an enduring commitment to a judicial complement commensurate to population and caseloads. Government funds, with calls on them for society’s needs in healthcare, education, right relations with Canada’s Indigenous peoples and First Nations, and sundry other matters which make our country a pluralistic democracy, are not easily re-directed into more timely criminal justice. Yet we observe that delivery of justice in a country’s criminal justice system is a measure of the rule of law and all else that follows for the delivery of government in the widest sense.

Another part of the solution, one we embrace, is the support of civil society. This means an ongoing conversation with individuals and groups toward building confidence and the exchange of ideas for a progressive criminal justice system. Law reform and a meaningful provision of legal aid across our country strike us as early topics for discussion.

Please let me know what you may require further to this letter. And let me offer the support of the people of First United Church in the vital work that lies ahead.

Sincerely yours,

Lisa Nafziger
Chair of Council

c: The Right Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator of the United Church of Canada
c: The Rev. Don Stiles, Chair, Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council
c: Dr. Rebecca Bromwich, President, The Church Council on Justice and Corrections of Canada
c: Catherine McKenna, Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre
c: Tony Clement, Conservative Party Critic for Justice
c: Murry Rankin, NDP Critic for Justice
c: Senate Committee on Justice