



Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office

Bureau de l'intervention en faveur des patients des établissements psychiatriques

November 29, 2007

Hon. Stockwell Day
Minister of Public Safety
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Day:

RE: Taser Review

We were pleased to read your November 20th press release calling for a review of RCMP protocols regarding the use of tasers. Although it is important to review the RCMP use of tasers, given the tragic death of Mr. Dziekanski, we also believe that it is important to review the practices of all police services across Canada. It is imperative that a comprehensive and transparent review be undertaken to ensure that the public has full confidence in their national and local police services.

Research indicates that tasers are often used with individuals who have or are perceived to have a mental illness. In many circumstances, de-escalation techniques are not employed before a taser is utilized. Tasers should only be used as a last resort after all other interventions fail. It is integral to have clear guidelines regulating their usage.

The disproportionate use of tasers against persons with an actual or perceived mental illness is indicative of a larger problem. Thus, the review should be broadened to include an examination of such things as: police training and education with respect to interacting with individuals with mental illness; intervention strategies when dealing with people in a crisis or high risk situation; responding to special communication needs; working with vulnerable populations, including those with mental illness; and the training of police officers respecting non-violent crisis intervention.

The Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office supports the inclusion of a process for consultation with consumer-survivors, families, service providers and advocates as part of the review. Broad-based consultation and an open and transparent process must be the cornerstones of the review process.

Should you have any questions, or if we can be of assistance, please contact David Simpson, Program Manager at (416) 327-7004. Again, thank you for your decision to review this important issue.

Sincerely,



Vahe Kehyayan
Director

c.c. Hon. Chris Bentley, Attorney General
Hon. Rick Bartolucci, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
Chief William Blair, Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police
Peter Cuthbert, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
David Simpson, Program Manager, Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office