

# NDP Caucus News

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## **Restorative Justice Panel Outlines Compassion, Community Approach to Justice**

*“Restorative Justice offers a series of principles, values, beliefs and processes that can increase the likelihood that people will reconnect and be healthy members of a community.” - Jessica Webb*

Last night, MHA Sheilagh O’Leary (St. John’s East-Quidi Vidi) hosted a panel on restorative justice that brought together key community groups, organizations, and advocates for an important discussion on how we put the justice back in the justice system. The conversation focused on recognizing that community safety and reintegration into society requires compassion-forward approaches that prioritize healing, accountability, and support for both individuals and communities.

The panel, moderated by Mike Murray, featured Jessica Webb (Relationships First NL), Dan McGettigan (Turnings), Melissa Noseworthy (John Howard Society), Marc Robert Benoit Humber (First Light), and Riley Moss (Roots of Resilience). The conversation focused on educating the public on what exactly restorative justice is and gave examples of how it can be done in our communities.

“It was amazing to hear the passion these panelists have for the work they do – they truly want safer communities, while ensuring compassion remains at the centre by meeting people where they are and giving them the support they need to successfully reintegrate into society,” said O’Leary. “We hear a lot of messaging around ‘lock them up’ or ‘jail not bail,’ and while those reactions are understandable, we need to challenge that narrative because, as was discussed last night, those approaches clearly are not working.”

“Restorative justice, as we learned, can be as simple as an offender writing an apology letter to those they have harmed, but also taking the important next step of understanding why they caused that harm and how they can change to ensure it doesn’t happen again,” said O’Leary. “When you truly listen to people and meet them where they are, that’s when healing can begin. When the focus is only on punishment, we miss the critical opportunity to help people work through their issues so they can heal, grow, and have a real chance to thrive.”

“With many educators in the room, we discussed how important it is for restorative justice to be available in our school systems, helping students at a young age who are struggling. It’s about giving people the opportunity to change, which is something that I believe our society struggles with,” O’Leary added.

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“This is just the first of many conversations I will be having around restorative justice, because we cannot keep believing that simply hiring more police will make our communities safer,” said O’Leary. “Safety must also come from ensuring people have the supports and resources they need to truly change and rebuild healthy lives in their communities, and to help and reassure those who have experienced harm. We are all human, and when we lead with compassion and community at the centre, that’s where real safety and trust is built.”

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For further information, contact Stephanie Curran, Media and Communications Officer, NDP Caucus at 330-0328 (o), or [stephaniecurran@assembly.nl.ca](mailto:stephaniecurran@assembly.nl.ca)