



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
Newfoundland and Labrador

Sheilagh O'Leary, M.H.A.
District of St. John's East-Quidi Vidi

July 9, 2026

Minister Helen Conway-Ottenheimer
Department of Justice and Public Safety
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Conway-Ottenheimer,

Thank you for the update on your trip to Ontario to witness their court system and how we can implement similar practices here at home. It was encouraging to hear you speak yesterday about the need to reduce the number of repeat offenders who not only place significant strain on our court system, but who will ultimately return to our communities and need the right supports to successfully rebuild their lives while keeping residents safe.

While you didn't mention it by name, what you described is the foundation of restorative justice. It's an approach that emphasizes accountability, rehabilitation, and addressing the root causes of crime so people are better equipped to successfully reintegrate into society. It's an approach that is dear to my heart, and one I strongly believe Newfoundland and Labrador should be investing in.

Just a few months ago, I hosted a panel discussion on restorative justice and why it is so essential, not only to reduce pressure on our courts, but to build safer communities. True public safety isn't just about punishment. It's about giving people the tools and support they need to avoid reoffending, and, ideally, to prevent them from entering the justice system in the first place. Representatives from incredible organizations, including Turnings, Relationships First NL, First Light, and the John Howard Society, spoke about the importance of investing in restorative justice at every stage, beginning in our schools. Teaching young people skills like conflict resolution, relationship-building, and accountability can help prevent harmful behaviours before they escalate and keep more people from ever entering the justice system.

Restorative justice has consistently shown that when we invest in repairing the harm caused by wrongdoing, rather than relying solely on punishment, we achieve better outcomes for victims, offenders, and communities alike. It helps people understand the impact of their actions, take meaningful responsibility, and access the education and support they need to make lasting changes.

Investing in restorative justice isn't about being soft on crime. It's about being smart on crime. It reduces pressure on our courts and correctional system, lowers rates of reoffending, and ultimately creates safer communities by ensuring people leave the justice system better equipped to succeed than when they entered it.

I would be pleased to offer my support in this effort and would welcome the opportunity to organize a roundtable discussion with these organizations to explore how we can strengthen and expand restorative justice in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have spent a great deal of time working alongside these organizations and learning from their expertise, and this is an opportunity to bring that work together in a meaningful way. Bringing together community organizations, justice professionals, and government would be a valuable first step toward building a system that better serves everyone. This is an opportunity to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for those who have been harmed, support meaningful accountability and rehabilitation for those who have caused harm, and ultimately build safer, stronger communities.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sheilagh O'Leary". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Sheilagh O'Leary
M.H.A. for St. John's East-Quidi Vidi