

**Minister of Justice and Attorney General Tom Marshall**  
**Speaking Notes: Annual Crime Prevention Conference**  
**Sir Wilfred Grenfell Campus (Gym)**  
**Saturday June 4, 2005 7:30pm**

Distinguished guests, and friends.

I would like to thank the Citizens Crime Prevention Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic Committee on Crime Prevention and Community Safety for the invitation to be here this evening.

As Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador it is indeed a pleasure to participate in this conference, and as member for the district of Humber East I am pleased to welcome you to the beautiful City of Corner Brook.

I have been impressed by the scope of the conference agenda, and the topics discussed during the past couple of days. We all have an important role to play in preventing crime by being active leaders in our communities, and have a responsibility to ensure that our communities are safe places to live.

Government and community have a responsibility to work together, to provide leadership and actively participate in the development and implementation of education, awareness and activities in support of safer communities.

This evening, I would like to take this opportunity to touch on a few of the recent programs and initiatives that we have undertaken in this province to help address issues of crime and violence.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to address, work with community groups and collaborate to find solutions and tools to help improve violence prevention. We recognize the challenges that exist, and are working to ensure improvements to programming, training, and resources to better deal with crime prevention.

The province introduced a “***Violence Prevention Initiative***” in 2001 to help find long term solutions to the problem of violence against those most at risk in our society - women, children, the elderly, and other vulnerable people who are victims of violence because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. The initiative is a multi-departmental,

government-community partnership whose vision is that the people of our province will live in safe, caring communities where there is an inherent respect for each other and violence is unacceptable.

The Violence Prevention Initiative is now wrapping up its current mandate and will establish a new management committee that will include community representatives. The new violence prevention program will include a new leadership structure, accountability mechanisms, educational and public awareness activities, and will respond to unique regional differences and strengths. The renewing of our current program will look at introducing new activities relating to violence prevention in categories important to the communities and to government departments in NL. These will include:

- Education - Early Prevention and Intervention
- Public Awareness and Attitudinal Changes
- Supports for early prevention services
- Reducing violence against Aboriginal Women and Children

- Community Responses - Prevention, Awareness and Education
- Leadership and Research

**Victim Services** is a dedicated justice service for victims with ten (10) professionally staffed regional offices throughout the province. The program is based on the principles that victims should be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect, that victims should suffer the minimum of necessary inconvenience from their involvement with the criminal justice system, and that victims should receive prompt and fair redress for the harm they have suffered.

The Department of Justice has recently announced the expansion of Victims Services to support a **Victim Services to Children program** which will strengthen justice services for child victims and witnesses under the age of 16. The introduction of a program for children will fill gaps which currently exist within the system by providing court preparation services to help children who testify in criminal proceedings. The court system can be intimidating and difficult for young children, and the establishment of a

program for children will help ensure that child victims have a support system in place. The new program will provide information services regarding the criminal justice system, pre-court preparation, and counseling and is expected to be up and running in the Fall.

In an effort to help address issues of family violence, a minister's committee was established in February 2005 to help identify and establish approaches to improve the justice response to women in situations of violence. This committee represents a collaborative partnership between government and community, and is assisting to develop short and long-term approaches to policy, service and legislative issues relating to violence against women.

We felt that it was important to put a committee together which represented a number of perspectives and individuals with a history of commitment to addressing violence against women. The ***Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women*** represents a group of government and community representatives who have experience and sound knowledge of issues surrounding violence against women, and includes representatives from: Victims Services, Courts, Police,

Public Prosecutions, Community Corrections, Legal Aid, Women's Policy Office, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Provincial Transition House Association, Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence - St. John's, Western Regional Coalition To End Violence (Western), and the John Howard Society.

We are committed to create meaningful legal tools to assist family violence victims, and intend to introduce **family violence legislation** in the Fall session of the House of Assembly. Family violence is a serious matter and we are committed to introduce better and more effective tools to help victims of family violence. This legislation will provide a broader range of more immediate remedies than those currently provided for in the Criminal Code, and will allow a more effective response for family violence victims.

I turn my attention to policing. Making communities safe and secure for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians requires adequate level of **policing**. We continue to make strategic investments in policing for Newfoundland and Labrador in support of both the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and

Royal Canadian Mounted Police to help improve resources, equipment and training.

We have been working diligently to address policing issues, and are listening to and understand that residents in the province want to feel safe and secure; we will continue to work with both the RNC and RCMP to address future needs of policing to the best of our abilities.

Government in partnership with Memorial University has set up a training program in the province to train, develop and retrain police officers for the province. This Fall, the program will introduce approximately 25 police officers to the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. The new training program at Memorial University should also significantly increase the pool of qualified candidates available to the RNC, thus ensuring its ability to deal with the increased number of retirements anticipated in the coming years.

In March, we celebrated the opening of a **new Supreme Courthouse in Happy Valley Goose Bay** which was a proud day for the courts, province and people of Labrador. Labrador has its own unique legal history which is reflected

in the judicial centre with the design encompassing many concepts which support the unique cultural aspects of Labrador and the aboriginal culture. The Judicial Centre of Happy Valley-Goose Bay incorporates concepts which are a first in the province, including an aboriginal healing room, and circle motif in the courtroom reflecting openness to aboriginal traditions.

A component of access to justice is the ability of an individual to access a justice system which takes into account unique cultural interests, needs and aspirations. This aspect of access to justice is particularly significant from the perspective of Canada's aboriginal peoples. The numerous aboriginal justice inquiries, Task Forces, commissions and governmental studies which have been conducted over the past 40 years have all pointed to the profound sense of alienation which is experienced by aboriginals in their interaction with the justice system. This sense of alienation is a product not only of linguistic, geographic and socio-economic factors but of cultural differences.

As noted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, “Aboriginal people find the justice system alien to their ways. They have difficulty with the adversarial, confrontational nature of the process” which many commentators have noted may be at odds with the collective and communal values held by many aboriginal communities. Whatever the reasons, it is certain that the existing justice system does not effectively address the needs of aboriginal people, as evidenced by the disproportionately high rate of incarceration of aboriginals in federal and provincial correctional facilities.

The problems facing aboriginal people are multi-faceted and the solutions to these problems are equally complex, requiring the cooperation and collaboration not only of the federal and provincial governments but the aboriginal communities as well. We must introduce reforms which will increase the confidence of aboriginal peoples in the fairness, transparency and integrity of the justice system and which will permit the justice system to accommodate, where necessary and appropriate, aboriginal values. Many of these reforms have been underway for sometime and will no doubt be familiar to you. For example, courts, operating

under the direction of the *Criminal Code*, now consider alternatives to incarceration and take the special circumstances of aboriginal offenders into account when imposing sentence. Community involvement in the sentencing process is being achieved through sentencing circles which are becoming increasingly common. Cross-cultural training has been undertaken by police and correctional agencies and greater emphasis is being placed upon the recruitment of aboriginal police and correctional officers.

Policing aboriginal communities has been and continues to be a challenge across this country given the cultural sensitivities of policing these communities. Consequently, we are concluding an agreement with the federal government to provide the needed financial commitment to the Innu and Inuit communities in Labrador that wish to enter into a First Nations Policing Policy. This policy is jointly funded by the province and Ottawa.

To name a few benefits of this policy, it provides for community policing by a legally established Community Consultative Group and, I hope, Inuit or at least aboriginal

RCMP officers. As well, the implementation of this policy will create savings that can be used to fund other justice initiatives in these communities. While this may not be the complete solution to policing these communities, it is my belief that it is a desirable and necessary first step towards ensuring policing that is both more effective and culturally sensitive to the needs of those communities.

These and related reforms are intended to achieve several broad objectives: to increase the presence and availability of justice services in aboriginal communities in the province, many of which are located in remote parts of the province which may be difficult to access at particular times of the year; to lessen aboriginal alienation by strengthening positive aboriginal representation in major justice agencies and services; to promote aboriginal understanding of the operation of the justice system; and to foster awareness of aboriginal issues and values by the justice system as a whole through the incorporation of culturally specific practices.

However, we are also considering measures aimed at more fundamental structural reform. We are now partnering with Justice Canada in the Aboriginal Justice Strategy. This is a

cost-shared program established by Justice Canada in 1996 to provide funding for four major types of community-based aboriginal justice programs:

- diversion or alternative measures established under provisions of *Young Offenders Act* or *Criminal Code*
- community sentencing programs such as sentencing circles and peacemaking processes
- mediation and arbitration in family and civil cases
- aboriginal justices of the peace and tribal courts

Through the Aboriginal Justice Strategy we are now funding a pilot project on Conne River which, if successful, may form the basis for a more comprehensive community justice strategy.

As these comments illustrate we have made substantial strides on a number of issues central to the administration of justice in the province. Efforts to change the culture of crime are a work in progress. We are cognizant that there is still a lot to be done and the government hopes over the course of its mandate, and as the fiscal situation improves to continue to make improvements to the justice system in this province

and, in particular, to access to it by our citizens. I thank you for your attention.

Congratulations on a successful conference and I encourage you to take the opportunity to enjoy the wonderful city of Corner Brook during your stay.

Thank you.