

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/recent-testimony-on-mandatory-sentencing-for-drug-possession>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

I testified last week before Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which is considering a legislative package requiring mandatory sentences for a host of drug possession and drug sale crimes.

This is an unfortunate piece of legislation, especially for Canada, which has long had a progressive prison system and has largely resisted the U.S. trend of passing mandatory and two- and three-strikes laws that have contributed immensely to our bloated prison system. All the legislators were thoughtful and asked good questions, and the supporters of the legislation clearly hope that it will be used in a limited and targeted fashion by their (relatively) non-political prosecutors. I tried to make the point that, in the U.S. context at least, these kinds of laws tend to be enforced with broad strokes and sweep huge numbers of low-level users and dealers into state prison systems at huge costs and little to no benefit. My fear is that despite their intent to only use these laws sparingly, street level enforcement will result in many more people being subject to these sentences than the legislators anticipate.

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