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Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia Ltd.

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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Inquiry into crime in the community Crime in the community: victims, offenders and fear of crime

Small business is concerned about crime in the community. In particular the effects it has for the victim, how the offender is treated and the fear that crime has within the community not to mention the cost that is both monetary and psychological for both the victim and fellow workers in the small business.

The information covered by the Australian Institute of Criminology Number 299 *Financial and Psychological cost of crime for small retail businesses* based on the Small Business Crime Survey conducted by the AIC and the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia is still valid.

Small business would like to see petty crime being taken seriously by insuring offenders are dealt with in a manner by which they will not re-offend utilising restorative justice methods.

Small business wants to see consistency in sentencing and offenders serving the full term of their sentences eg the use of real 'truth in sentencing' not the situation of say 4 years where an offender can be out in 18 months if they behave themselves. It should be that they come out on the due date, that is 4 years, if they behave.

Small business wants to see a strong police presence in our communities that would improve community awareness and provide a feeling of security rather than fear. The increase in alarm systems (business and homes) and presence of dogs has helped ease the fear in some cases. Society is more aware of crime than ever before and where security systems do not exist either in businesses (or home or car) there is a greater likelihood of crime being committed.

The impact of being a victim is enormous. Many suffer from both physical and psychological effects that are not only painful but can be confusing and frightening. The victim often finds the legal system intimidating and frustrating when they are not able to fully understand or comprehend the proceedings. In the event the victim provides an identi-kit photo or victim impact statement

often causes the victim to relive the crime when in reality they just want to forget. Unfortunately victims often relive that frightening moment when they close their eyes or drift off to sleep giving them a 'slow motion movie' replay. Many victims never expect it to happen to them and as such are not prepared for the effects of being a victim. Many feel their privacy and personal security has been taken away from them. In cases of serious crime of victim violence many can have sleeping, eating, anxiety and fear disorders which leads to added stress and distress. In some cases the victim feels that they are at fault and that what happened could have been prevented. The victim is not alone in suffering the pain of the crime this is often felt by members of their family (who by default become victims themselves) and sometimes the victim finds it difficult to relate how they feel, their thoughts, and their fears to their fellow family members and/or work colleagues. This causes family dislocation, uncontrollable mood swings and often nightmares as a result of being a victim. The effects on victims and their family life (and work life) can cause irreparable damage leading to the break up of relationships. Often victims find it difficult to write an impact statement because they are unable to express in words how they feel as a result of the crime against them. Community and law enforcement need to be more aware of how a victim is feeling as a result of the crime against them so they can be more understanding of the pain and suffering the victim goes through due to no fault of their own. This is particularly important in the first few hours after the crime in the way they handle and treat the victim.

Crime will be reduced in our society when members of our society accept their responsibilities for themselves. This requires them to understand that society does not owe them a living and that the social disorder that causes crime to occur needs to be addressed not only by society but by the individuals themselves. Society needs to have established rules and regulations that are followed and not waived because of sex, race and socio-economic factors. Society needs to accept its responsibility to rehabilitate and re-educate offenders, regrettably when offenders refuse to change their behaviour then society has a right to isolate them from the community. When offenders know this will be the result of their behaviour then we may see a change in that behaviour in our society.

If you require any further comments regarding this submission please contact:

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