

SPEAKING NOTES
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MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL

RELEASE OF 2005 CRIME STATISTICS
(Please check against Delivery)

Good morning.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics released its annual report on crime statistics for the year 2005 earlier today. I am here to respond on behalf of the province.

These statistics are important because they provide us with important information about the overall picture of offending and victimization in our province – we use this information to develop the direction of our policies and programs.

For the second consecutive year there has been a decline in Saskatchewan's overall crime rate. We saw a small decline in 2004 – about two per cent. And a six per cent decline for 2005.

As in other years we see that most crime in Saskatchewan – 86 per cent in 2005 – falls into two categories: property crime at 38 per cent, and “other” *Criminal Code* offences at 48 per cent. The “other” *Criminal Code* category includes offences such as mischief, disturbing the peace and bail violations.

The decrease of 6 per cent in Saskatchewan's crime rate in 2005 is as a result of a 12 per cent decrease in property crime and a 2 per cent decrease in violent crime.

Less than one in seven of all crimes reported in Saskatchewan are violent in nature. Most violent crime in Saskatchewan – 60 per cent – is common assault, the least serious form of assault. It includes behaviour such as pushing, slapping, punching and face-to-face threats.

All major types of property crime were down in 2005 – break-ins fell 14 per cent, motor vehicle thefts dropped 17 per cent, thefts \$5,000 and under were down 8 per cent, and fraud was reduced by 20 per cent.

You all have the fact sheet with the data, I won't go into more detail on that – what I want to talk about is what the data are telling us, and how we are responding to offending in Saskatchewan.

It is important to understand that, in general, Saskatchewan residents are about as safe as residents of other provinces.

A report by Statistics Canada, released last year at about this time, found that the vast majority of Saskatchewan residents – 94 per cent – feel safe in their homes and communities.

In Saskatchewan, we continue to see that our poorest communities – in the inner city, on-reserve and in the north – experience the most crime.

We also see that about half the offending against another person, and the victimization that goes with it, occurs within the Aboriginal community. And that a significant amount of violent crime is committed within relationships.

Our reported crime rates, like other western provinces and the territories, are high – this is a matter we take very seriously.

Saskatchewan Justice and Saskatchewan Corrections and Public Safety have developed a strategy to reduce offending in Saskatchewan that includes:

- reducing reliance on the justice system to solve social problems;**
- improving the relationship between the justice system and Aboriginal peoples;**
- and supporting targeted integrated crime reduction approaches.**

We recognize that a number of social problems manifest themselves as offending behaviour and that reducing criminal activity depends on providing people with opportunities to lead positive and productive lives. It also involves changing the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the justice system.

The Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform made more than 100 recommendations identifying reforms to reduce offending and victimization and changing the relationship.

In May 2005, the Government of Saskatchewan released its Action Plan to respond to the recommendations of the Commission.

The Action Plan is a three year strategy that maps out comprehensive, long-term initiatives to help meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

In 2005-2006 more than \$48 million was committed to the Action Plan. For 2006-2007, more than \$31 million in new funding will be invested – bringing total annualized spending to \$80 million.

While some of this new funding is directed to new initiatives, some will be directed to enhancing or expanding existing programs. A number of the initiatives outlined in the Action Plan are targeted specifically to First Nations and Métis peoples, while others, though not targeted, will have a significant positive impact on Aboriginal people.

Our Action Plan includes programs and services to help people with addictions to drugs and alcohol.

It extends supports to families and children with cognitive disabilities, including FASD, and expands children's mental health services.

It includes more educational opportunities for Aboriginal students and a tracking system to help school divisions keep youth in school.

It expands victims' services programs and it established a second Aboriginal Provincial Court party.

The plan is extensive and I have only touched on a few of the many initiatives it contains. I ask that you consult the Saskatchewan Justice website for more detail.

Our third key strategy is also aimed at reducing offending and victimization in Saskatchewan communities. Working with partners in communities we have developed some targeted approaches to address particular crimes.

The Regina Auto Theft Strategy is a targeted, integrated approach involving the Regina Police Service, Public Prosecutions, Corrections and Public Safety, Community Resources and Employment and SGI.

It is a four-point strategy to reduce auto thefts through strict supervision and control of those youth who are most likely to re-offend; an effective combination of enforcement and rehabilitation; and early intervention and education on crime and its consequences.

Building on what we learned from the Auto Theft Strategy, integrated, targeted initiatives have been implemented in the Battlefords, Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

Each strategy has a different focus – in the Battlefords, it's children under 12 years of age who are involved in repeat offences; in Saskatoon, it's break and enter offences; and in Prince Albert, it's adult offenders involved in break and enter and violent offences.

And each has a different approach – but these partnerships have two important common elements:

- **there is significant community commitment; and**
- **the strategies are community driven.**

Work is underway to implement integrated, targeted crime reduction strategies in Meadow Lake and LaRonge. Each will be based on the unique needs of those communities.

These strategies are working – the data we are seeing today tells us that these approaches are effective.

For example, the 2005 rate for motor vehicle theft for Regina was 46 per cent lower than it was in 2001.

The break and enter rate for Saskatoon was 17 per cent lower than the year before and data from the Saskatoon police service shows significant further decreases for the first five months of the year.

We are advised by Prince Albert that they are seeing a reduction in property crime this year with quite a large drop in the number of residential break and enters.

Another example of integrated approaches is the establishment of bylaw enforcement teams in the two largest cities. Teams are made up of fire and protective services; the regional health authority; the police service; Safer Communities and Neighbourhood investigators (from Justice); the Department of Community Resources; the local Housing Authority; and community associations.

In Regina the strategy is led by the Regina Police Service and in Saskatoon by Fire and Protective Services.

These teams share information between the different agencies in order to maintain and improve the safety and quality of rental housing stock. Each agency has a variety of different tools at its disposal to help achieve these objectives. As a side benefit of ensuring safe housing, crime issues are also exposed and criminal operations can be shut down as well.

The cities have tools to maintain safe housing, such as property maintenance and nuisance abatement bylaws, but the establishment of these teams brings all the players together to be even more effective.

The Department of Community Resources has added 600 new housing units and renovating up to 700 low-income homes. The Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement provides an incentive to low-income families to look for good quality housing.

In one Regina neighbourhood, the destruction of sub-standard housing, which was replaced with new units, and renovations to existing houses has attracted long-term tenants. The principal of the local high school has seen the school population stabilize and significantly improved attendance. The Chief of Police tells us there has been a corresponding drop in crime in that area.

While these initiatives are largely focused on property crimes, we have also implemented a number of initiatives directed to reducing violent crime.

The North Battleford Domestic Violence Treatment Option Court is a special court that deals exclusively with charges of spousal assault. An accused who takes responsibility for their behaviour is referred for programming aimed at rehabilitation.

Based on positive outcomes, a second therapeutic domestic violence court was established in Saskatoon and work is underway to establish a third in Regina.

In November 2005, the province announced on-going funding of more than \$2 million annually to expand suppression of gang activity in Saskatchewan. The strategy includes increased personnel in policing and prosecutions as well as funding for activities such as wire tap surveillance, and execution of search warrants.

While we are putting more resources into enforcement and prosecution of gang activity, it is also important to identify and understand the underlying causes behind the gang phenomenon.

The Saskatoon Gang Strategy announced earlier this month takes these important factors into consideration. It is a multi-layered, community-centred built on the three pillars of prevention, intervention and suppression.

All of these initiatives are about doing business in a new way. They reflect the overarching view of the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform that we need to take a holistic approach to reducing offending.

In closing this morning – we are working with our partners in the justice system, in other departments and with communities throughout the province to address these challenges in ways that result in meaningful change:

- **by reducing reliance on the justice system to solve social problems;**
- **by improving the relationship between the justice system and Aboriginal peoples; and**
- **by reducing offending through targeted integrated approaches.**

This is an ambitious agenda that takes our justice system in some important new directions.

No single program or initiative will reduce the crime rate in our province. Many new and exciting initiatives have been undertaken and many are showing great promise and success. We will continue to build on that success.

We are committed to continuing to work with our partners in all levels of government and in communities to find solutions with long-term impact.

Thank you for coming – I'll take your questions now.