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Ottawa Journal ? action on cyberbullying

Bullying and cyberbullying are serious concerns to many Canadian families and communities. Recent high-profile cases have highlighted the harm that cyberbullying can cause. While bullying has long been a major burden on the many children who are targeted, cyberbullying can bring it into the home. Unfortunately, it can seem like there is no escape. It's important for Canadians ? parents, educators, law enforcement ? to help make children and youth aware that this perception doesn't have to be reality.

Our Government has delivered a range of measures, including education, awareness, prevention, and enforcement, to address the issue of bullying, and has recently taken additional steps specifically focused on cyberbullying.

Our education and awareness measures include the website GetCyberSafe.gc.ca to inform Canadians about online safety. Other steps include Facebook, where posts on bullying were shared over 6,500 times in February 2013 and seen by over 500,000 people. Canadians should also be aware of NeedHelpNow.ca, a new website offering information to youth. For young people who have made the mistake of sharing a sexual image of themselves the website offers tips on getting content removed from major websites and strategies for addressing the issue with their peers.

We also support prevention through the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). Since 2007, the NCPC has funded approximately 30 projects to prevent bullying and youth violence. It has developed practical resources, including guides for parents and educators. In 2012, our Government committed $10 million for new prevention programs, including the prevention of school-based bullying.

Bullying and cyberbullying often include criminal offences, which can be addressed under the Criminal Code. This includes harassment, issuing threats and child pornography. In 2011, our Government passed legislation requiring Internet service suppliers to report child pornography websites to the police, promoting enforcement against this very serious crime. Moreover, our Government passed the landmark Safe Streets and Communities Act. Among other important measures to combat crime and stand up for victims, this legislation contains Sebastien's Law ? reforming the Youth Criminal Justice Act to prioritize the protection of victims of crime and of society. Now our children can be protected from young offenders who commit serious and violent crimes, such as assault. While not all bullying consists of criminal activities, when it does, it must be treated particularly seriously.

Our Government continues to take action. Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently met with the parents of several victims of cyberbullying, to offer condolences and open the discussion on how to better protect our youth. Rob Nicholson, Minister of Justice, has committed to expediting an ongoing review of the Criminal Code to identify gaps in the law that could be closed to combat and deter cyberbullying. This review is looking at the distribution of intimate images without consent from all those depicted and considering what can be done.

One of the highest priorities of any society must be the protection of our children. Whatever form bullying takes, it must be taken seriously and combated energetically. This is why our Government continues to support a range of measures, including education, enforcement, and potentially new legislation. In particular, given the reach and toll of cyberbullying, we are supporting initiatives like NeedHelpNow.ca while studying legislation and consulting parents and other Canadians on additional measures. We will always work to protect our young people.

David Tilson, MP Dufferin?Caledon