

Rae says Calandra ?stigmatizing mental illness by playing politics?

By playing politics with mental illness, MP Paul Calandra and the Conservative Party are not only stigmatizing those living with mental health issues, they are making our streets less safe.

First, some context. Our justice system provides a third option for those who, at the time of the act, were too sick to understand what they did was wrong ? people who are deemed ?not criminally responsible.? These individuals are incarcerated in a secure facility with psychiatric services.

Before they can rejoin society their case is considered by special board that is better equipped than a regular court to determine their treatment and the level of danger they pose.

The Conservatives are trying to mislead the public into thinking this system is broken. In fact, the government's own research shows that its success rate is high ? offenders have drastically lower rates of re-offending than in mainstream correction systems.

Yet under the Conservatives Bill C-54, one serious offence would brand someone as liable to repeat-offend or present a greater risk to society ? based on no evidence and going against decades of science and myth busting about mental illness. This will force them into mainstream prison, from which they will almost certainly emerge far more dangerous and likely to re-offend.

The Conservatives argue that Bill C-54 is about the rights of victims. If these changes were only about advancing the rights of victims, the Liberal Party would support them. But Bill C-54 goes well beyond that and stigmatizes the mentally ill, and offends basic Charter protections that will ultimately weaken the rights of every Canadian. We simply cannot support that.

This damaging stigma will make it harder to get people into treatment ? yet treatment is most effective preventative measure for the few people with mental illness who commit serious offences.

By voting for C-54, Mr. Calandra is playing on the politics of fear to perpetuate myths and stereotypes about mental illness. That is wrong, and will make us less safe.

Bob Rae, MP

Liberal Party of Canada