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[www.fathersmentalhealth.com](http://www.fathersmentalhealth.com)

December 7, 2023

The Honourable Stanley Kutcher, Senator

The Senate  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0A4

**Re: Bill S-251 An Act to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada**

Dear Senator Kutcher,

I want to take this opportunity to thank you and your fellow Senators for putting forward Bill S-251 and to offer my unwavering support of this Bill. You stand on numerous shoulders of previous Senators who have also fought tirelessly to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada and establish a legal protection for children and youth from the assault of corporal punishment. It is alarming to learn of the several previous defeated efforts to prevent this type of harm to children. I agree, the time is now.

As a parent, physician, educator and psychiatrist with an expertise in child and parental mental health, I am in full support of Bill S-251.

There is no valid reason or excuse for corporal punishment. Yes, parenting is tough. The evolutionary advantage of the developmental period of “not listening to people of authority” may be a mystery yet continues to be a universal experience. We know that we didn’t always listen to our own parents and yet this did very little to prepare us from being on the receiving end of non-compliance. It can feel incredibly frustrating to be ignored, opposed and underappreciated. Sometimes when we are interacting with our children, we can have these exact feelings; so can they. When these moments evoke big reactions, we often see ourselves as having had an irrational response while trying to manage an irrational child. It is critical for parents to be aware of our emotions in these moments and to be able to express them in a way that is effective and in control. We want to feel confident and comfortable with how we respond to any situation. These moments are opportunities to role model effective communication and emotion regulation with our children, which become both valuable lessons and important moments for connection. Managing difficult moments well, will strengthen our relationships and support the resiliency of our youth.

As the founder of the Fathers’ Mental Health Service and a child psychiatrist in an acute care setting, I have witnessed the impact on families who experience challenging, complex and even traumatic situations within and outside the home. The parent(s) and child relationship is a key factor in determining either the risk or resiliency of a child’s future. Corporal punishment undermines the sense of safety, trust, support and confidence that a child can experience with

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their parent. Corporal punishment and the accompanied fear and pain is never understood by a child as something deserving and appropriate. It is a strain on their relationship and following one incident, there is an increasing likelihood of recurring behaviours or worse, escalated types of harm and aggression. Children of marginalized populations are at an even great risk of being harmed.

In my work with fathers, I see firsthand that men are motivated to become the best version of themselves as they pursue fatherhood. Transitioning to parenthood can be a catalyst for the flooding of one's own childhood memories including times of being hurt and punished. Fathers (and mothers) are keen to find a new and more effective way of supporting their children especially at times when they are not listening. They are not interested in spanking their child. Parents are also in support of Bill S-251 and the protection of all children.

The research and peer reviewed literature from our colleagues and the stories and concerns of our neighbors are all important, valid and clear reasons to repeal Section 43 of the Canada Criminal Code. This action is in keeping with the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and in line with other nations who have repealed similar laws. Bill S-251 stands to protect both adults and children, and especially the relationship between them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read 'A. Howlett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew L. Howlett, MD FRCPC  
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