Justice Committee

Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Sacro

Sacro agrees that the creation of a duty on relevant justice organisations to set clear standards of service for victims and witnesses would increase their confidence in the criminal justice system. It would also seem appropriate that such a duty should be underpinned by the right of victims and witnesses to receive appropriate information regarding their case.

Vulnerable witnesses should have the right to access certain special measures when giving evidence. However, they should not be required to do so as some may prefer to appear in court, and the ability of victims to remain in control of their experience is important.

The proposal that courts should consider the issue of compensation in certain cases would benefit from the inclusion of restorative approaches, allowing victims to receive direct or indirect apologies from offenders and well as practical reparation.

The introduction of a victim surcharge would, in our opinion, be unmanageable. In particular, given the number of offenders currently imprisoned for non-payment of fines, this proposal has the potential to increase the prison population unnecessarily. However, the option of community reparation as a payment-in-kind could provide many of the positive aspects of this proposal.

Tom Halpin
Chief Executive
8 April 2013