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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

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Vellacott calls for Canadian Bar Association to play constructive role in equal parenting debate

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OTTAWA – MP Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon-Wanuskewin) today called for the Canadian Bar Association to play a constructive role in the unfolding debate on equal parenting following divorce, in response to negative tones raised at the annual meeting of the CBA being held in Dublin, Ireland.

Echoing Justice Minister Rob Nicholson’s statement at the conference that best interests of the child must indeed be paramount in family law, Vellacott pointed out that “the central problem being addressed in my Private Member’s Bill is quite simply that ‘best interests of the child’ are not defined in the Divorce Act.”

“It’s like having a car without an engine and a steering wheel, in which the only way to move the car is with lawyers pushing and judges supposedly steering, all of which is done at great expense to divorcing parents and taxpayers,” he continued. “It’s simply not fair to Judges, taxpayers, parents, and least of all the children of divorce,” he added.

“The unsubstantiated views voiced by a few CBA members at the conference are not constructive” Mr. Vellacott noted in reference to calls made by Meg Shaw reportedly on behalf of CBA to reject Bill C-422.

“It’s time for a reality check. First, Canadians overwhelmingly support shared equal parenting according to polls. Secondly, social scientists have long confirmed that this arrangement is generally the optimal outcome for children as well as parents. Third, children themselves prefer continuity of relationship with both parents and associated family. Fourth, all political parties agreed 10 years ago in the “For the Sake of the Children” report that shared equal parenting was the way to go. Fifth, all indications point to growing non-partisan consensus in this parliament that it’s time to address commitments made by all parties a decade ago.”

“Let me state for the record that Bill C-422 reflects extensive input from the Canadian extended divorce community, whose members well understand the realities of family law through trial by fire. In many ways, it is they who are the experts, and I also call upon all Members of Parliament to accord them the long overdue status as primary stakeholders in this complex issue,” Vellacott emphasized.

Vellacott noted, “Working with the Canadian Equal Parenting Council, a coalition of 40 organizations, we have developed legislation that not only defines decision criteria for the best interest of the child, but also faces up to the contentious issues of child abuse and inter-partner violence. It represents a solid down payment for long overdue reform in family law.”

Vellacott concluded, “I now call upon Mr. Kevin Carroll, the incoming president of the CBA, to join us in constructively refining the legislation. This is not only for the sake of the children, but ultimately for the sake of all Canadians.”

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