

Budget watchdog slams feds over tough-on-crime changes

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OTTAWA -- The federal government has failed to be upfront with Canadians about the costs of its plan for tougher sentencing guidelines for criminals, Parliament's budget watchdog said Tuesday.

Kevin Page, the parliamentary budget officer, also said bureaucrats with the Correctional Service of Canada refused several requests from his office to provide him with more information about the anticipated costs of the Conservative government's Truth In Sentencing Act, legislation that would eliminate credits criminals can earn to reduce their sentence based on the amount of time they spend in jail before sentencing.

Page said that, despite the government's failure to provide his office with detailed information, he has been able to estimate that the government's new law will cost taxpayers up to \$640 million a year. The government, though, has not factored those additional costs into its budget planning, Page said.

"Parliamentarians should be concerned about the lack of transparency on the costing of the Truth in Sentencing Act," Page said.

Page said the bill means provincial and territorial governments will also have to deal with "significant" costs.

The Truth in Sentencing Act came into effect in February. As a result, judges can no longer give two days credit for every day an inmate served before sentencing and now must allow for only one day credit for every day served.

Page said he calculates that change will extend the average stay of each inmate in a federal facility by about 160 days to two years.

That, in turn, will mean an additional \$147,000 a year per inmate to keep that criminal in jail longer.

David Atkin is [24 Hours'](#) Parliamentary Bureau Chief.