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MPs urged not to scrap the gun registry

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OTTAWA - The mother of a young woman gunned down nearly 20 years ago urged MPs not to scrap the gun registry, arguing the human costs outweigh any price tag of retaining the registry.

Pricilla de Villiers, who became an advocate for tougher laws and gun control after her daughter Nina was murdered in 1991 while jogging in Burlington, Ont., told the Commons public safety committee Wednesday the debate must shift from the rights of gun owners to the rights of victims.

"In the many debates linked to the gun registry, we've heard little acknowledgement that incalculable human suffering has resulted from the use of firearms, whether criminal, accidental, or self-inflicted," she said.

"Fatalities and traumatic injuries are listed as statistics with little attempt to assist the enormous loss to our society, our communities and to our families."

MPs on the Public Safety committee are studying C-391, a private member's bill that would repeal the gun registry created in 1995.

Bill Blair, chief of the Toronto Police Service, told the committee the registry has saved lives and is useful for solving serious crime.

"The rank and file officers of my service tell me they need the information in the registry to do their jobs - communications dispatches, regularly check addresses to provide first responders with information that keeps them safe," he said. "Front line cops ask for registry checks when approaching a potentially dangerous situation, tactical officers check the registry to determine the number and type of weapons when entering the residence of a barricaded person or executing a search warrant."

Pierre Maurice of Quebec's public health institute said homicide and suicide rates by firearms have dropped since the registry was implemented because fewer lost, stolen or incorrectly stored weapons are getting in to the wrong hands.

"Access to a firearm has long been recognized in the scientific literature as an important risk factor for homicide and suicide because access to a weapon makes it much easier if that person is so inclined," he said.