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# Will money saved from mandatory prison be put to good use?



The decision to strike down mandatory minimum sentencing for gun crimes may have the effect of reducing prisoner costs to the federal government, says Toronto criminal lawyer [Jordana Goldlist](#).

However, She hopes the diverted costs will be put to good use.

"If the government is truly trying to end gun violence, they need to fund programs that address the root causes and they need to break the cycle for people already caught up in the system.

To keep a single prisoner in a federal institution costs approximately \$114,000 a year, says Goldlist, and that translates to a minimum cost of \$342,000 for every person convicted of carrying a loaded, prohibited or restricted firearm when the mandatory minimum was in effect.

The Ontario Court of Appeal said recently the federal government's mandatory minimum sentences for certain gun crimes is unconstitutional, a move, Goldlist says, that will, "allow judges to do their job unimpeded and consider not only the crime but the circumstances of the specific offence and the offender being sentenced."

"I would love to see the federal government divert some of the money being spent on incarcerating people into education programs, after-school programs, sports teams, the arts, and mentoring programs that could perhaps prevent youth from falling into the type of lifestyle that has them carrying guns.

"Without the three-year mandatory minimum for first offenders, there should be a program that incorporates mentorship opportunities as an alternative to such lengthy terms of incarceration."

Mandatory minimums are nothing more than a Band-Aid solution,

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says Goldlist, and ignore the underlying issues of why young people are carrying guns in the first place.

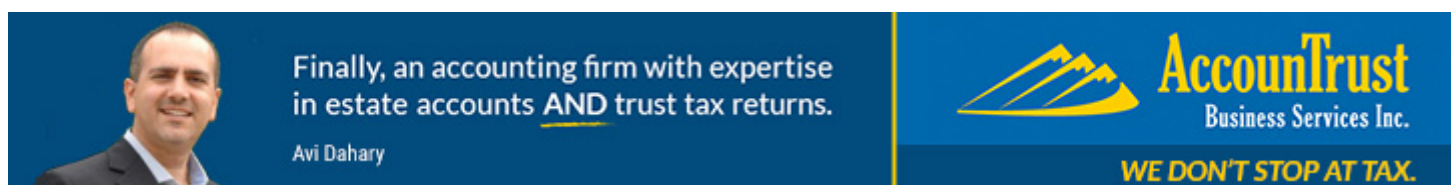
"If someone gets caught with a gun we lock them away for years and that's that," says Goldlist. "they serve their time and return to the same communities with the same skill set and mentality that saw them carrying a firearm in the first place. If they had opportunity to participate in a program that could help them get out of the lifestyle and allowed them to use their experience to help others than perhaps we might actually see a change in the pattern."

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