

**Violence against Women**  
**An urgent concern for all Ontarians**

**After a Summer of Grief we need Practical Government Action**

**A call for All-Party Cooperation in the Ontario**  
**Legislature**  
**in support of**

**Emergency Measures for Women and Children**  
**In the Fall 2000 Legislative Session**

**To All Parties of The Legislature of Ontario:**

This summer, the brutal and unrelenting reality of violence against women was brought home to Ontarians. Virtually daily reports of women murdered or seriously injured by abusive partners or stalkers served to underline the urgent nature of the crisis.

As well as the highly publicized murders of Gillian Hadley of Pickering and Bohumilla Luft of Kitchener: Hemoutie Raghunauth of Pickering, Harjaap Bolla of Mississauga, Laurie Lynn Vollmershausen of Stratford, Renee Joyson of St. Catherines and Patricia Real of Etobicoke were brutally murdered.

Maria Frana of Malton, Zahra Zeinali of Rexdale and Camille Bonterre of Scarborough just barely survived horrific injuries. Theirs are only the reported attacks, and they all took place within just a few months over this past summer. The shocking murder of Jennifer Zumach serves to further underline our concerns.

These are not random or isolated crimes committed by strangers. On average, 40 women a year in Ontario are murdered by their partners or former partners. Men are charged daily with assaulting, threatening and stalking their girlfriends, wives or common-law partners, both past and present. Hospital rooms treat women and children injured by family members every day. And while thousands of women seek refuge in women's shelters, many more remain with abusive partners because they do not have the means to leave.

It is well established that violence against women is rooted in social, political and economic inequality between men and women. Women are not victims by nature; we become victims because we cannot access the means to protect and support our children and ourselves. **Strengthening women's economic and social position therefore must be the centerpiece of any plan to stem violence against women and children.** Adequate social and economic supports may well have saved some of the women murdered this past summer.

Canadian society is becoming dangerously polarized between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', and many women find ourselves at the short end of the stick. Over the past two decades, the percentage of women living in poverty has been climbing steadily "...almost 19% of adult women are poor..."<sup>1</sup>. This has unquestionably weakened women's position in averting partner-abuse.

While all women live with the threat of male violence, aboriginal women, racialized women, recent immigrants, women with disabilities and poor women are faced with compounded inequalities that weaken our position even further.

In recent months, public discussion of solutions has focused on the criminal system and "tightening up" on offenders as well as pouring money into programs for male batterers. While violence against women needs to be understood as a serious crime which is the responsibility of the men who commit it, the tendency for policy-makers to divert attention away from the needs of women and children is both dangerous and reprehensible.

Women's advocates have long called for criminal law reforms to ensure much needed protections for women and children but we are disturbed by the way our safety issues are now used to justify law-and-order initiatives in place of effective social programs. Law-and-order rhetoric is based on the exploitation of public fears of 'stranger danger'. It favours the use of heavy-handed law enforcement strategies against socially disadvantaged groups, which in no way address the violence women face in their intimate and familial relationships. It also serves to scare off women in low-income and racialized communities from reporting violence, putting them at further risk of death or serious injury.

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<sup>1</sup> Townson, Monica (2000) *A Report Card on Women and Poverty*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Male batterer programs are as yet unproven in their effectiveness and cannot, in any case, be seen as a priority over much-needed programs and services for women.

Years of cuts to social programs, legal aid, direct anti-violence services and neighbourhood supports have left women in a hardened state of inequality, leaving us increasingly defenseless in the face of abuse.

Women's safety depends on a comprehensive, consistent, long-term approach that addresses the root problem of women's social, economic and political inequality. Numerous reports, studies, inquest juries and safety audits have documented the broad range of policies and programs needed to ensure the safety of women and children. It must be our goal and responsibility as a society to address all of these needs, in their entirety.

But women and children cannot wait. The coming session of the Ontario Legislature must enact immediate measures, which bring down some of the obvious barriers standing in the way of women's ability to protect ourselves and our children.

**The following groups, representing women from all sectors, communities and walks of life across Ontario endorse the enclosed list of emergency measures and urge all parties in the Ontario Legislative Assembly to work for their implementation by the end of the Fall 2000 session of the Ontario Legislature:**

**Signed:**

*List of Endorsing Groups*

## **Emergency Measures for Women and Children**

**In the Fall 2000 Legislative Session**

### **A. Community Based Services for Women and Children**

We call for the immediate establishment of a \$50 million fund for the provision of community-based services to women and children to be spent on the following measures:

1. **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**Crisis Lines**

The few Crisis Lines that do exist for women who experience violence are hard pressed to meet the need for their services. A busy signal can mean the difference between life and death for a battered woman. The Toronto-based *Assaulted Women's Helpline* gets crisis calls from all over Ontario but is funded to serve only the Toronto area. A province-wide line that serves women in a broad range of languages is a critical addition to (not replacement for) local crisis lines.

- Make the *Assaulted Women's Helpline* a province-wide service as per its proposal circulated to members of the Legislature this summer.

**Shelter funding - OAITH**

Since 1995, demands for shelter services have increased while financial pressures on shelters have resulted in diminished services to women and children. This summer, shelters across Ontario were at full occupancy and overwhelmed with the increased number of crisis calls. While the allocation of \$10M in last year's budget for transitional workers and child witness programs was a start towards addressing the overstretched resources of emergency women's shelters, these front-line services need significant reinvestment to ensure appropriate assistance to the women and children who seek refuge there.

- The coming year's budget should allocate a further \$15 million in annualized funds to independent community-based women's shelters, including those not currently funded by the MCSS.
- In communities where there is a documented urgent need for additional shelter beds, funding should be allocated to begin this expansion (as promised in the Government's Common Sense Revolution documents).
- Immediately implement the shelter funding review, as recommended in the Arlene May Inquest report.

**Second Stage Housing Programs - SECOND STAGE ALLIANCE**

Access to housing, beyond the emergency stage, is an essential protection. Many women, who have found the courage to leave, find themselves returning to abusive situations because they have no housing options. Second stage housing is a critical safety bridge for these women and their children. This sector is currently dangerously under-funded and under-staffed.

- **Allocate \$3,360,000.00 in annualized funds to Second Stage Housing Programs via Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.**

### **Sexual Assault & Rape Crisis Centers - OCRCC**

Community outreach workers at rape crisis centres are struggling to keep pace with demands. Women who cannot or do not want to contact police rely on rape crisis centres as their point of contact. The centres are crucial in linking women to appropriate social services.

- **Reinstate the 5% cut to rape crisis centre funding and make provision for annualized increases in core support.**
- **Fund one community outreach worker per rape crisis centre.**
- **Fund counselors within rape crisis centres to provide support for women who are sexually harassed in the workplace.**

## **2. COMMUNITY & NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORTS**

The number one place of disclosure of violence against women is to family and friends. Isolation of women within their neighbourhoods and communities is an urgent concern. Local women's groups and services need links to province-wide advocates to access up-to date information so they can effectively support women. Shelters, rape crisis centres, counseling services and crisis lines are struggling to provide specific services to Francophone and First Nations women as well as women of colour and women with disabilities. Supplementary community supports are essential.

- **Grant funding for women's neighbourhood & advocacy groups - TORONTO WOMEN'S NETWORK**
- **Funding to province-wide women's anti-violence advocacy groups - OAITH, OCRCC**
- **Trained violence against women cultural interpreters in Immigrant and Settlement agencies - OCASI**
- **Sufficient and stable funding to French language services in community-based agencies throughout Ontario. - ACTION ONTARIENNE**
- **Stable funding support to Women's Centers. - NORTH YORK & RIVERDALE IMM WOMEN'S CENTRES**

## **B. Legal Reforms and Services -**

**METRAC, OAITH, ASSAULTED WOMEN'S HELPLINE, SCARB LEGAL CLINIC**

We call for a further \$50 million to be immediately allocated to ensure the following legal reforms and services:

1. LEGAL AID -

Women have a constitutional right to fair and equal treatment under the law. This right can only be exercised if they are ensured access to legal representation. With the legal aid system in a funding crisis, supports for women fleeing abuse are increasingly inadequate.

- Increase hours for private representation of abused women in Family Court matters. Abandon plans to increase use of duty counsel. - **AWHL**
- Provide funds for cultural, deaf and ASL interpretation in Family Court as per the current provisions for criminal and immigration court. **AWHL**
- Extend Legal Aid coverage to abused women to include divorce and all property matters. **ALL GROUPS**
- Provide Legal Aid to women who are victim/ witnesses in criminal cases. **METRAC?**
- Provide Legal Aid funding or representation of women making human rights complaints about harassment in the workplace. **OFL**

2. CRIMINAL LAW REFORMS

Criminal law reforms to increase protections for assaulted women have been on hold for many years. The Province has yet to implement the many, detailed recommendations of the Arlene May Coroner's Inquest Jury and must do so immediately. There is no need to wait for results of further inquests. Recommended changes must be put on the front burner.

- Risk Assessments must be conducted, and offender's previous history of violence must be completed and on file, before first bail hearings for abusers. **AWHL**
- When release on bail is granted with a no-contact order to men charged with of violence against women, one breach of that order must mean that he is denied further bail. **OAITH**
- Immediate direction to Crown Attorneys to argue women's Charter rights to life, liberty and personal security in all bail hearings. **METRAC/ OAITH**

3. FAMILY LAW REFORMS

Fear for the safety of their children is one of the most important concerns for abused women. Manipulation of the Family Court system is a

common tactic of abusers to continue their control over the family. Possible apprehension of children who are witnesses to violence is a major deterrent to women reporting abuse.

- Implement a policy of no mediation where there is evidence of past or present abuse. There can be no negative judicial inference when women decline mediation due to safety concerns. **ALL GROUPS**
- Increase the availability of supervised access exchanges and centres to ensure they are available to all women who have safety concerns. Improve and expand the nature of supervised access so that fathers and children can have safe, meaningful visits with proper, trained and consistent supervision. **DEBATE THIS in GROUP**
- Implement the family law recommendations of the Arlene May inquest Jury. - **OAITH**
- Implement a mechanism to track the impact of new child welfare legislation and practices on abused women and child witnesses of violence (Child & Family Services Act). **OAITH**

## C. Economic Survival and Workplace Safety

We call for the allocation of core Government resources to ensure the economic survival and workplace safety of women and their children across the Province:

### 1. ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

Financial solvency is central to women's safety. Without it, many women remain in, or return to, abusive relationships. Women who have no economic supports have no way of fleeing violent situations. Most women leaving abusive situations need welfare and other social supports to re-build their lives and the lives of their children.

- Implement an annual cost of living adjustment to welfare rates to take effect immediately.- **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**
- Referrals to a community legal clinic, via plain language letters, to all people denied a benefit or cut off welfare. - **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**
- Anyone denied benefits through the new call centres is linked, by phone, to a community legal clinic for advice. - **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**
- Drop the appeal on the "spouse in the house rule" to ensure that women are able maintain financial independence. **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**

- Drop the plan to penalize for "benefits stacking and maintain current policies allowing women to access multiple Provincial services as they need them". **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**
- End the clawback of the Federal child tax credit for families on welfare (approx. \$50 per child per month). **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK - TORONTO WOMEN'S NETWORK**
- Implement a policy to abandon the practice of requiring and/ or requesting that women disclosing violence seek child support or spousal support in order to qualify. **OAITH, AWHL,**
- Full deferment of or voluntary participation in workfare for social assistance recipients disclosing violence against women. **ONTARIO SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK - OAITH**
- Fund Pay Equity - 1% adjustment to all proxy agencies to ensure the survival of women's agencies and services as they meet their legal pay equity obligations. - **OCRCC, OAITH, and other provincially funded women's services - LAW SUIT WAS IN PROGRESS CHECK ON THIS WITH MARY EBERTS**

## 2. WORKPLACE PROTECTION

Working women who are suffering abuse in the home, sexual harassment at work or who are being stalked are in danger of losing their jobs due to related absences or lowered performance and currently have no protection from termination. Women cannot be made to choose between their jobs and their safety. The current review of the Employment Standards Act allows the Government to enact immediate workplace protections for abused women.

- The Province designates the first week of June as Sexual Harassment Awareness Week in honor of Teresa Vince who was killed by her harasser on June 2, 1996. - **OFL/CAW**
- Include, in the Employment Standards Act, protection from termination for women who are facing harassment, abuse or stalking in the home or workplace. **OFL/CAW**
- Extend the proposed Emergency Family Leave provisions to provide protection for women who are being assaulted, abused, harassed or stalked at home or in the workplace. **OFL/CAW**
- Extend proposed Family Leave provisions to cover workplaces with less than 50 employees, as only about 5% of all businesses in Ontario have more than 50 employees. **OFL/CAW**
- Employment Standards Act parental leave provisions be extended an additional seventeen weeks to cover the entire one year period for which Employment Insurance benefits are now available. **OFL/CAW**



# Declaration of Commitment

## **Emergency measures on violence against women**

### **In The Province of Ontario for the Fall 2000 session of The Legislature**

*We the undersigned hereby endorse and actively agree to work for the following emergency measures for women and children in Ontario as detailed in the attached document under the following broad categories:*

#### **Community-based Services**

**A \$50 million fund to be established to ensure adequate community -based services and supports to women and their children.**

#### **Legal Reforms and Services**

**A \$50 million allocation to ensure legal reforms and services.**

#### **Economic Survival and Workplace Safety**

**Immediate allocation of core Government resources to ensure women's economic survival and workplace safety.**

*We further declare that we will work towards the implementation of these measures by the end of the current legislative session.*

**Signed at the City of Toronto in the Province of Ontario on the 20th day of September in the year 2000.**

**For The New Democratic Party:**

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**For The Liberal Party of Ontario:**

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**For The Progressive Conservative Government of Ontario:**

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