

[Letterhead for Maison d'Hébergement Pour Elles Des Deux Vallées]

Gatineau, November 6, 2018

Standing Committee on the Status of Women
House of Commons
Ottawa

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women:

We understand that the committee is undertaking a study on the network of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence, and that the committee's study will examine:

- the current gap between the need for and available beds in shelters and transition houses;
- current federal programs and funding in support of shelters and transition houses; and
- possible solutions to address the gap between need and supply.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Maison d'Hébergement Pour Elles Des Deux Vallées. We are a nine-bed shelter located in the Outaouais region, and we serve the Vallée-de-la-Lièvre and La Petite Nation areas. We work mainly with women who have been the victims of domestic violence and their children. Last year, we took in 35 women and 74 children, and we had to turn away 215 women and 178 children because of a lack of space.

This has been a major problem in the Outaouais region for many years. There is never enough space, the shelters are always full, and an eighth shelter is needed to meet the needs in the area. Women are sleeping in their cars while they wait for a spot to become available or, even worse, they are staying with their abusive partner. Not every woman has a network that can house and support them. Last year, the seven shelters in the Outaouais region housed 452 women and 380 children and had to turn away 1,874 women and 969 children because of lack of space (that number does not include women seeking shelter because of homelessness or for other reasons besides intimate partner violence who had to be turned away). Our partners, such as the Crime Victims Assistance Centre (CAVAC), the police, social workers from the integrated health and social services centres (CISSS), and the domestic violence help line have expressed their concern about the ongoing lack of available spaces in our region.

We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that, since the restructuring of CISSS services, there has been a significant increase in the number of requests for external services (no housing required) for women and children across Quebec. Given the unrealistic funding and the fact that we provide services 24/7, we are not able to add more shifts. It is therefore very difficult to offer quality internal and external services.

We believe that shelters are not receiving equitable funding from one province or territory to another. In our case, we have not had a significant increase in our subsidies for a number of years now. The work that we do is essential. The lives of women and children are at stake. We offer more than just a shelter from violence, even though that is a very important part of what we do.

As you know, in Canada, a woman is killed by her partner or former partner every six days. In addition to guaranteeing the safety of women and children, we also provide services such as support groups for women and children; assistance with obtaining social, legal and medical services; coffee sessions; food aid; and awareness workshops at schools and community organizations.

We would like to make the following recommendations.

- Since violence against women has reached epidemic proportions, shelters and transition houses for women and children affected by violence against women must be recognized as an essential service.
- Right now, shelters and transition houses are severely underfunded. We recommend a significant and sustained increase in basic funding. This funding should be used to increase the number of beds and shelters available, as well as to hire staff and provide services. There is no sense building a shelter if there is no staff to run it.
- We support the call of Women's Shelters Canada for a national action plan. The Government of Canada should develop a national action plan in line with the United Nations recommendations. Like the national housing strategy, this action plan should involve the federal, provincial and territorial governments. In Canada, in 2018, every woman should have access to comparable services, no matter where she lives in the country.

We invite you, the committee members, to visit our shelter if you are in the area and/or to contact us by telephone with any questions you may have about the work that we do. That would give us an opportunity to tell you more about our reality.

Sincerely,

Annick Brazeau
Executive Director
Maison d'Hébergement Pour Elles Des Deux Vallées

c.c. Stéphane Lauzon