



November 9, 2018

House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thank you for the opportunity to work together to end violence against women. We are front line transition house workers from Ishtar Women's Resource Society (IWRS). We work alongside women and children who have experienced intimate partner violence. IWRS offers many services to women and children in our community of Langley BC. This includes, two transition houses (Libra and Ishtar), counselling for women, counselling for children, victim services, outreach and donations.

As one of Canada's first transition houses, Ishtar has been working with women and children for over 45 years. We believe that with the honour and privilege of working with women and children for decades comes the responsibility to share what they have taught us. We have listened to their experiences to learn what they need from our services and have also been able to identify where the gaps are.

As a feminist organization, we also know that it is essential to look at women's experiences through the various intersections of oppression they face. We know that while all women are at risk of violence, women who are marginalized are more at risk. This is due to the discrimination they face based on factors such as race, class, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age and ability. We believe this understanding is essential to identify the diverse needs of women and children affected by intimate partner violence across the country who are accessing shelters and transition houses.

Current gaps between the need for and available beds in shelters and transition houses

The need for beds is continuously more than we can accommodate due to lack of funding. Our two transition houses regularly run at or over capacity. Between the two, we were forced to turn away more than 1500 women and more than 620 children in 2017 who experienced violence and are in need of a safe place to stay. We know that women and children are most at risk of being killed at the hands of their intimate partners when they leave, especially if they do not have a safe place to stay. We also know that women and children who do survive after leaving their violent partners are often forced to make impossible decisions due to inadequate support and a lack of financial resources. Women are faced with choices that often put them at risk for even further violence including sex work, returning to violent partners, staying in violent situations.

Currently in our community and the surrounding communities we are continuing to see the impact of the last provincial government as they systematically dismantled much of our social safety net. This has exacerbated the housing crisis. While change is coming with an increase from provincial funding, it will take years to recover. Women need housing now.

Transition houses are also working to try and fill the gap caused by the housing crisis resulting in more single women who are elderly, chronically homeless, who use substances and are struggling with mental health issues. Women who come to us from co-ed homeless shelters

disclose that they do not feel safe sharing space with men and are often victims of violence when seeking refuge in homeless shelters.

Solutions and Recommendations to the Government of Canada

In order to most effectively address our current state of crisis we need to develop a strategic plan that focuses on short, mid and long term solutions. Short term solutions will ensure that all women who are seeking safety for themselves and their children can have access to a safe place in their community of choice upon their first call for help, whether they come from a remote, rural community or a large urban centre. This requires a multitude of services that meet the diverse needs of women. While mid and long term solutions must also be explored, here we offer you solutions for immediate relief:

- ✓ Implement the recommendations of the Indigenous communities whose lands we occupy. Programs must prioritize the needs of Indigenous women.
- ✓ Diverse programs that help support women who are struggling with substance use and mental wellness issues as well as services for women who feel unsafe or triggered by sharing space with women who are actively using.
- ✓ Fund and create more homeless shelters that accommodate women and children only.
- ✓ Many women will not leave violent situations for fear that their pets will be severely abused or neglected if left behind. There are extremely limited resources available to help support women in these types of situations and having more transition houses that are pet friendly would make a huge difference to women.
- ✓ Take immediate action at the federal, provincial and municipal levels to ensure that women and children can access housing that is safe, affordable and sustainable. All levels of government need to work in partnership to demand that new developments set aside a percentage of units as affordable rental units and/or rent-to-own units.
- ✓ Implement a federal Housing Benefit similar to the Canada Child Benefits to put more money directly into the hands to women to be able to make choices about where to secure housing.
- ✓ Provide federal rental supplements to help to reduce rental costs to 30% of an individual's income to make housing more affordable.
- ✓ Cap rent increases to help to lessen the gap between the actual cost of housing and what people who are living at or below the poverty line can afford.
- ✓ Create additional long term subsidized housing units.
- ✓ Implement a living wage.

Respectfully Submitted,
On behalf of Ishtar Womens Resource Society
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