

November 14, 2018

Attention:
Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women
FEWO@parl.gc.ca

From: Carole Tremblay, Maison d'hébergement le Rivage, La Baie, Quebec

Re: The great need for safe houses for abused women

Dear members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women,

We understand that the Committee is conducting a *Study on the System of Shelters and Transition Houses Serving Women and Children Affected by Violence Against Women and Intimate Partner Violence* and that the Committee will focus on:

- the current gap between the number of beds required and the number of beds offered in shelters and transition houses;
- existing federal programs and funding for shelters and transition houses; and
- possible solutions to fill the gap between supply and demand.

I am writing you on behalf of the Maison d'hébergement le Rivage. We are a 19-bed shelter located in the borough of La Baie in Saguenay. We serve primarily women who are experiencing multiple social issues (partner and family violence, sexual abuse, homelessness, mental health disorders, and so on) and are 18 years of age or older, with or without children. The safe house is adapted for persons with reduced mobility or who are visually or hearing impaired. Last year, we served 133 women and 26 children. Unfortunately, we refused 19 requests because of lack of availability at the time of the call.

In our view, safe houses do not receive equitable funding from one province or territory to another. In our case, we have not had an increase in funding since 1981. In fact, we have only occasionally received a cost-of-living increase. The work that we do is essential; the lives of women and children are literally at stake. We offer more than a simple shelter from violence, a very important aspect in itself. As you know, one woman is killed by her partner or former partner every six days in Canada. In addition to ensuring the safety of women and children, we also offer programs that support women and children with legal proceedings, medical issues, housing searches, finding financial resources or clothing, school entry, and so on.

As shown by the comments below, women who have been sheltered at le Rivage are satisfied with the services received:

[translation]

- "My children and I enjoyed ourselves. I was comfortable and I could be myself. The women did not judge me and were nice to me. Thank you for the good service, I appreciate it."
- "A big thank you with all my heart and thank you to the entire Rivage team; you are an excellent resource that restores hope in life. A competent team that I would recommend without exception to all women in difficulty and I would be very comfortable returning to le Rivage."

We would like to make the following recommendations:

- Since violence against women persists at an epidemic level, shelters and transition houses for abused women and their children must be recognized as an essential service.
- Shelters and transition houses are currently seriously underfunded. We recommend a significant, sustainable increase in core funding. This funding should increase the number of available beds and safe houses, as well as cover staffing and services. Building a safe house without the necessary staff is futile.
- We support the appeal of Women's Shelters Canada in favour of a national action plan; the Government of Canada should develop a national action plan aligned with the United Nations' recommendations. This national action plan, like the National Housing Strategy, should involve the federal government as well as the provincial and territorial governments. In 2018, every woman should have access to comparable services wherever she lives in Canada.
- We also support the notice sent to you by the Fédération des Maisons d'hébergement pour femmes (FMHF) calling for a significant increase in funding for the overall mission of our organizations, which lost 20% of their funding over 15 years because indexing did not fully cover operating expenses.
- Finally, we support the recommendations of the FMHF.

We invite the Committee members to visit our safe house if you are passing through our area and/or to contact us by telephone at 418-544-4626 if you have any questions or would like further information on the work that we do.

Sincerely,

[original signed]

Carole Tremblay,

Executive Director

Maison d'hébergement le Rivage de La Baie

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c.c. Karine Trudel, MP: karine.trudel@parl.qc.ca;

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