

## House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

### Need within British Columbia

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women issued findings and recommendations on November 18, 2016 after the Committee's review of Canada's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Not only has women's equality in Canada regressed over the last two decades, but British Columbia is lagging behind the rest of Canada in several key areas, including:

- BC consistently has among the highest poverty rates in Canada, and poverty rates for single women, and particularly single women caring for children, are shockingly high. Further, BC is the only province in Canada without a poverty reduction plan.
- Families led by women parenting alone experience the highest rates of food insecurity in BC, and the rate is higher than the Canadian average for comparable households.
- The average earnings of women in BC are well below the Canadian average female earnings and the pay gap between male and female workers in British Columbia is larger than the national average.
- Mothers' workforce participation rates in BC, access to regulated child care spaces in BC, and provincial public investment per space are all below the Canadian average. Meanwhile, parent fees for regulated child care are higher than the national average.
- Frontline services for women and children harmed by violence have been chronically underfunded, despite the fact that BC has a growing rate of domestic violence-related homicides.
- BC's per capita spending on legal aid, services that are crucial to enable women to enforce their legal rights and leave violent relationships, is far lower than the national average.<sup>1</sup>

British Columbia is currently working on a poverty reduction plan, including a community findings report, with the goal to bring forward poverty reduction legislation in the Fall, 2018. Supported by BC Housing, Homeless Prevention Programs across the Province have created a substantial resource for women who are leaving shelters, enabling women to transition to the next stage of housing. However, for many women, there are simply not enough available services.

### Need within Victoria:

Within the Capital Regional District (CRD) of Victoria<sup>2</sup> specifically, Statistics Canada reports that there are approximately 45,215 women, with 66% of the single women classified as poor - the

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<sup>1</sup> The BC Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Group. "Campaign calls on BC government and official opposition to 'step up for Women's equality'". *BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre*. Feb, 2017. <http://bcpiac.com/step-up-for-women/>

<sup>2</sup> Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation *2017 Rental Market Report* defines Greater Victoria (the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area) as Victoria, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich, Sidney, Esquimalt, Langford, View Royal, Colwood and Sooke.

highest rate of poverty within any subgroup. The low income of these women precludes them from finding suitable housing in the private sector market and public housing programs are targeted towards families or seniors. As well, the below-zero vacancy rate combined with a scarcity of affordable, bachelor and one-bedroom units in the CRD make it very difficult for single, vulnerable women to find suitable housing. The only viable alternative has been secondary suites in existing homes. Therefore, single women (the majority of whom have limited incomes) find it extremely difficult to secure affordable housing when seeking to leave abusive relationships.

### **Urgent Need to Address Intimate Partner Violence Nationally**

The following statistics from the Canadian Women's Foundation demonstrate the widespread impact of domestic violence and abuse in Canada:

- Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner;
- 67% Canadians know a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse;
- Over 6,000 women and children sleep in shelters on any given night because it isn't safe at home;
- Indigenous women are killed at six times the rate of non-Indigenous women;
- Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual are three to four times more likely than heterosexual women to report experiencing spousal violence, and one in two trans people are assaulted;
- Children who witness violence in the home have twice the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes; and
- 70% of spousal violence is not reported to the police.

Those experiencing domestic violence sometimes stay with their abuser because they are financially dependent upon them; leaving an abusive relationship may involve a "choice" between remaining with an abuser and falling into poverty and/or homelessness. In one particular study, 40% of those who had experienced domestic abuse said this experience made it difficult for them to get to work, and 8.5% said that they lost their jobs as a result of abuse. Finally, violence against women costs taxpayers billions of dollars every year, with Canadians collectively spending \$7.4 billion to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence alone.<sup>3</sup>

### **Urgent Need to free women from remaining in abusive relationships**

We need; consistent core funding to maintain current program services to **eliminate wait lists**, which will allow us to offer more than a band aid solution for traumatized women and children; essential **prevention education** and **media campaigns** to end the cycles of abuse; to **build facilities**, especially second and third stage housing to address service demands, such as the federal funds BC Housing received for women fleeing intimate partner abuse; more **legal funds** specifically for intimate partner violence; to **reform the court systems** to protect women and their children by assessing each case for dangerous behaviours, rather than protecting the abusive father's rights at all costs. In Victoria BC, Andrew Berry killed his two daughters Aubrey 4 and Chloe 6, when the court insisted he have unsupervised visitation on Christmas Eve in his home with no hydro power. Tragically red flags about his behaviour were missed. High risks cases should be referred to fully funded **Regional Domestic Violence Units**.

Respectfully Submitted, Makenna Rielly, MA, Executive Director – 250-592-2927 ext#216

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Women's Foundation. "The Facts About Gender Based Violence."

<https://www.canadianwomen.org/the-facts/gender-based-violence/>. See also, the Homelessness Hub, "Domestic Violence". <http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/legal-justice-issues/domestic-violence>