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Maison d'aide et d'hébergement
pour femmes victimes de violence
conjugale et leurs enfants

Shelter for women victims of conjugal
violence and their children

Lachine, November 14, 2018

Attention:

Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO@parl.gc.ca

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

Re: The dire needs of women's shelters

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 women's shelter, *Le Paradis*. Our resource has 16 places and is located in a western suburb of Montreal. We serve female victims of violence and their children. Last year, we offered shelter to 225 women and children as well as psychosocial support through our outreach services. We also supported dozens of persons (women, employers, families or other professionals) through our 24/7 crisis line. Our occupancy rate has exceeded 100% for several years in a row, and we ended last year with a rate of 106%. We cannot respond to all requests for accommodation, and many have enormous difficulty finding a safe shelter. In addition, our outreach intervention services (not requiring shelter) face an enormous overload with waiting lists of over three months for women as well as children.

We are constantly sought out for our expertise. We are asked to lead violence prevention workshops for youth in romantic relationships and provide training on screening for abuse among women and children living in a violent environment. We are unable to respond to all of these requests even though the needs are specific to our sector. We have also developed special expertise with immigrant women who are victims of violence; unfortunately, our resources are inadequate and prevent us from reaching out to them with the necessary support even though they are very often the most vulnerable.

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 for several years. 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.

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 to observe our ever-growing needs firsthand. Please feel free to contact me by telephone if you have any questions or would like further information.

Sincerely,

[original signed]

Sonia Dionne
Executive Director

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