



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 118 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, October 29, 2018

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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon. First of all, I would like to apologize to all our wonderful witnesses who have held on. I recognize that we're an hour behind, and I do apologize for the loss of your precious time, especially as we recognize from this study that the work you do is so sensitive to time. I was going to read my comments in French, but I first want to make sure that everything's going well.

We're going to be merging these two panels. Each group or each individual will have seven minutes to present, and then we'll be starting our rounds of questioning.

Welcome to the 118th meeting on the status of women.

[Translation]

The committee is resuming its study on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

[English]

We have all our groups here. I am pleased to welcome Megan Walker, from the London Abused Women's Centre, who is the executive director. From Windsor-Essex Transgender and Allied Support, we have Jayce Beaudin-Carver, executive director. Donna Mullen and Marilyn Ruttan are appearing as individuals. That is our first group.

Joining them today we have Grace Costa, general manager for Eva's Satellite, on video conference. From SAVIS of Halton, we have Alma Arguello, executive director, and Tara Setaram, who is the crisis counsellor for human trafficking.

We're going to start with Megan Walker for seven minutes. Megan, you have the floor.

Ms. Megan Walker (Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre): Thank you so much.

The London Abused Women's Centre provides advocacy, support and counselling to women and girls over the age of 12 who are experiencing violence from their intimate partners in sex trafficking or prostitution, harassment in the workplace, or harassment by other means.

We are a non-residential service. We believe very much in supporting prevention, which is of course much easier to address than it is to respond to the issues that women face on a daily basis.

We are not a Housing First agency. We believe that Housing First is really restrictive. We propose "women first" instead, and making sure that we listen to the needs of women and have appropriate services available for them as needed.

It's a very difficult time for women right now. Between January and August, we saw 106 women murdered, almost exclusively by men. Of those 106 women in Canada who were murdered, 33 were killed by their intimate male partners, and 70% of them were killed in their own homes. We know that the most dangerous place for women is not in a back alley but in their own homes. We have to work to change that.

We have a major issue with referring women who require shelter to shelters. Shelters are overflowing. We are now transporting some women and paying to accommodate them in agencies across the country. That shouldn't be.

Women are arriving at shelters with their children and with their clothes in the trunk of the car, but they can't access those shelters. It creates an extremely dangerous situation for women and girls. We are very concerned about the lack of shelter space.

We also know from a Housing First perspective that in the municipality of London, Housing First means that every woman gets into a home and not a shelter. We are now seeing the beginning of the end of Salvation Army shelter beds for men and women, because they are going to have to close those beds over the next three to five years to accommodate the principles of Housing First.

It's very difficult for women and girls to access housing, even when they have rent supplements. Through the provincial government's trafficking fund, we have been given rent supplements of up to \$600 a month to give to women who are leaving trafficking. Combined with the city and the Ontario Works allowance, they have around \$1,100 to \$1,200 a month, yet there are problems, because a one-bedroom unit in London is \$847 a month; a two-bedroom is \$1,055; and a three-bedroom is \$1,193. As you can imagine, there's very little money left to spend on food, clothing, or care for your children when you're in that situation.

We also find incredible discrimination by landlords against women who are being abused or trafficked. Many women are turned away by the landlord, even when they find a home they can afford. This is very difficult for us, because those women then are literally left homeless. They have no shelter bed and no accommodation in an apartment.

We are fundamentally supporting a recommendation that goes to the source of the problem, which is that male violence against women is an epidemic. If we were talking about violence in any other format except against women and we knew that 106 women were murdered this year, largely by men, with 33 murdered by their intimate partners, all bells and whistles would be going off. If it were an epidemic with respect to a flu or SARS or anything like that, we would be taking immediate action, yet for some reason we still continue to minimize the lived experiences of women and pretend it doesn't happen.

It's time to get our heads out of the sand and realize that we all have a role to play, especially government, in preventing women across this country from being murdered, particularly when they're being murdered by a man who is supposed to love them, and in their homes, which for most of us is the safest place we can be.

That's our first recommendation: we want the Government of Canada to recognize this as the epidemic it is.

•(1635)

Further, we want the government to respond to this epidemic by including full core funding for all services that are helping women live their lives free from violence and abuse.

We want to see major public awareness and education programs so that future generations of girls and boys grow up knowing that this is wrong, that the value women and girls have is not from the attention paid to them by boys and men, but in fact from who they are as people.

We want men and boys to know, growing up, that being macho is no longer something that we talk about. In fact, what we talk about is being a man who considers women to be human beings, to be respected and loved and cared for.

We also want to see a heavy investment in prevention. As I say, I think if we can see the results of one woman being alive today because of preventive action, we've done our job. We need to do that with much more frequency and with a much greater investment.

I also should say that we do provide service to many trafficked women. Overall last year we provided service to 6,000 women and girls, and of those, 1,400 identified as being prostituted and trafficked. We have no safe house anywhere in the region, and these women don't want to go to shelters, where it's like a flophouse where they have to go and leave, and go and leave. They also don't want to be in a domestic violence shelter, because their needs are so different. They want their own space, a place they can call their own, where they are safe from their pimps.

In your discussions around shelters, we would like to see that you are also including safety for sexually exploited and trafficked women and girls.

I did it with one second to go.

The Chair: You're fantastic. Thank you very much.

Jayne Beaudin-Carver, you have the floor.

Ms. Jayce Beaudin-Carver (Executive Director, Windsor-Essex Transgender and Allied Support): I want to thank the committee for asking me to participate in this important conversation regarding the state of shelter services for women and children.

I was confused by my invitation to address all of you here today. Yes, I am a woman who has worked in the women's homelessness sector, and yes, I am a woman with lived experience. However, the only narrative I can provide for you today is from the marginalized perspective of the most underserved community in Canada. I am the founder and executive director of Canada's only transgender and family support centre, based in Windsor-Essex.

Our agency is completely unfunded by any level of government, and operates solely by donation and contract services to other organizations. I'm also a transgender woman who has experienced homelessness, and I have first-hand knowledge of the barriers faced by my community when attempting to access services.

This year, for the first time, the Windsor community added gender identity, with transgender being one of the options, to the list of questions asked during the Point in Time Count. Even though our community chose to gather this information, no level of government requests this information outside of the binary choice of male or female for any sort of data collection. The administrators of the count were surprised to see that 3% of the community identified as being part of the trans community.

To the larger community, 3% may not sound like an alarming number, but we know trans-identified people are still afraid to self-identify for fear of not being able to access gendered services and of what they may experience when accessing those services.

Having worked in a women's shelter, I know these shelters are always at capacity, and in Windsor we actually have just 12 beds for single women. This has required shelter operators to be creative and use crash mats to accommodate additional women above what they are funded for.

For trans women who are accessing emergency shelter that is already at capacity, asking for any kind of accommodation to feel safe in and accessing that vital service is impossible. Our community is also one of the only ones I've ever heard of that does not have a family shelter program and does not use a motel program, which most communities use as an overflow program.

We know that there is no research currently that can give accurate statistics on homelessness and domestic violence in trans communities. There are very many systemic reasons for this. Even if shelters are asking about gender identity in an inclusive way at the service level, we know our government is not requiring shelters to actually keep statistics on trans people accessing services.

The most accurate portrayal of the needs is found in the Trans Pulse Project done in southwest Ontario. Even when studies are completed, they lump trans identities in with lesbian, gay and bisexual groups, which do not face the same barriers to access as we do. If we continue to research and keep statistics only on the LGBT community as a whole, we will never have an accurate portrayal of the barriers faced by the most marginalized of our community.

Trans women are still being turned away from women's services every day, although it is illegal to do so. We are still being told that our presence in women's services is triggering for cisgender women who have faced violence at the hands of men. Trans men who have faced violence are being sent to men's homeless shelters, and many report experiencing sexual violence while staying in these shelters. Many of these instances go unreported to authorities and to shelter staff because they are aware that this is their only option for a place to stay.

We hear them, though. We see them come into our centre, hopeless and without options. They are not just stories to us. These are our friends, people we share common experience with, people who matter.

Non-binary people are being forced to choose either male or female when accessing any services, as our communities will still only serve people within the binary concept. Not only is this a disservice to our community, but it also does not give an accurate portrayal of the needs of marginalized people who require access to these services. Because our government does not ask about gender identity, we will never have a real understanding of the needs of our community. This means that our government will continue to fund women's beds and men's beds, instead of safe beds. After coming out, many of us lose our support systems, our families, our jobs and our homes. The trans community has a 43% suicidality rate.

In a country with laws that are so progressive in observing the rights of trans identities, why are our systems still set up to only serve cisgender people? Because our systems are not set up in a way that is inclusive of trans identities, 92% of trans-identified people are too afraid to access public spaces.

●(1640)

Seventy-seven per cent of the people in our community experience homelessness at some point throughout their transition, but they stay in dangerous living situations for longer periods of time to avoid accessing services, and 40% of our community members do not access emergency health care or residential addiction services when needed.

Our organization has been in operation for a year. We got the keys to our drop-in centre on May 1, 2018. Of course, there are no concrete statistics that supported the opening of a transgender-specific centre, which also means that we were unable to secure funding for operations or services.

What I believe is that if you build it, they will come. Since our opening, we've had 1,500 visits to the centre for various reasons, such as our food bank, clothing bank and counselling services, but most of all for advocacy support in gaining access and accommodations for services in the greater community that feel safe.

I am disappointed that in 2018, I still have clients calling me to report being pulled out of bathrooms at shelters for using the wrong bathroom, being forced to share accommodations that match their ID, or feeling unsafe in accessing the shelter system. They would rather sleep in the doorway of my centre until we open and catch some sleep there.

I'm appalled by the need for me to call shelters and advocate for why it is appropriate for our client to access that particular shelter and what their duty under the law is to accommodate that person. How comfortable would any of you be in having me call for you to access a shelter, where you know that I first had to argue for your right to be there? How would you be able to trust the staff, administration, or even the environment, knowing that you would not even be allowed to be there unless someone advocated for you first?

Even recently, I had a client report that their accommodation under the code, which we advocated for, was removed. They were returned to a bed that does not match their lived gender after breaking a minor rule.

Accommodations are not rewards; they're required under our law for safe access.

Some of these very things that I bring to you today are part of my own story and the stories of many of those in my life. Many other marginalized populations have been a target for additional funds and resources to change their outcomes and lower staggering statistics; the trans community is tired of being erased in service delivery.

Our people are dying, and it's time for this to stop.

●(1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was an excellent presentation.

We are now going to move over to Donna and Marilyn, for seven minutes combined.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan (As an Individual): We would like to thank our MP, the Honourable Dr. Kellie Leitch, for the invitation to be here today.

My name is Marilyn Ruttan. I'm a real estate broker, and I've owned and operated the RE/MAX office in Wasaga Beach for the past 29 years. Donna Mullen is a mortgage broker in Wasaga Beach

The Chair: I'm sorry, but could you reduce your speed? The translation is having a wee bit of an issue catching up with you.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: Yes, I do talk fast.

Donna Mullen is a mortgage broker in Wasaga Beach and has been in business for the last 25 years.

I was originally asked if I could come and discuss before your Standing Committee on the Status of Women the accessibility of single women affording their own homes, and access to housing for women.

I quickly messaged back to state that single women are not coming through our doors anymore to buy homes—

The Chair: Marilyn, go a little bit slower, please.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: —especially since last January, when the new mortgage stress test was introduced. It is difficult enough for a two-income family to qualify, let alone a single woman or a single woman trying to get back on her feet after having been in a stage one shelter or a stage two shelter situation. Women can't buy a home without first qualifying for a mortgage, and the big banks are not at all accommodating or welcoming.

I asked if I could bring Donna with me so together we can give you a picture of the challenges that women are facing. Donna and I are both hands-on in our respective careers, and we deal directly with the end consumer on a daily basis.

We received a follow-up email from the committee with the request to tie in with your study on the network of shelters and transition homes serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

Donna and I started brainstorming. We gathered as much information as we could, and then we interviewed several women. We interviewed a woman who worked at our local shelter in Collingwood, which is called My Friend's House, and who has worked for the past 25 years in the Collingwood office of the Ontario Works assist program. As well, we interviewed local counsellors to discuss the new social housing construction projects that are under way in Simcoe County.

Donna and I have a few recommendations that we feel, if implemented, could help transition some women, maybe even just 20%, out of stage two shelters—

The Chair: Marilyn, please go just a little slower.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: —to make room for women who are in stage one shelters.

Donna is going to recommend some necessary changes to a few CMHC programs that would help more women to be able to buy homes.

Ms. Donna Mullen (As an Individual): My name is Donna Mullen, and I'm a third-generation survivor of domestic violence. I'm also a survivor of a human rights case, which started in 1992, due to having asked questions. The human rights case was worse than any physical violence that I'd ever had happen to me previously.

I'm going to get right to the goods. Marilyn and I are—

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: We've taken a lot out.

We realize there are a lot of great programs, at least in Simcoe County, to help women who are in transition and living in stage two shelter housing, but there seems to be a disconnect between the women who wish to buy a home—maybe 20% or 25 % could be moved—create security, and build equity for their future and accessing a mortgage broker and real estate agent who understand the sensitive issues. This disconnect applies to both sides of the equation.

As realtors, we can further our education through various online Canadian and American training courses to earn designations and certificates. There are all kinds of them, such as senior specialist or accredited buyer specialist. You can get a certified Internet

professional, and they've just come up with a new one called “at home with diversity”. There are many more, but there are no designations or accreditations for sensitivity training and necessary mentoring that would teach real estate agents and mortgage brokers what they need to know to specifically help women coming out of adverse situations.

The course should include teaching real estate agents and mortgage brokers ways to navigate all the programs currently available through CMHC, the provinces and their local county—

• (1650)

The Chair: Marilyn, I love your energy. We're so much the same.

We're going to have to go a little more slowly.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: Okay.

We think we could come up with a program that would help. Donna has a lot to talk about with regard to the qualifications. The course could be created jointly by the women who are currently counselling women in phase two shelters, mortgage brokers and real estate agents. We could bring it out right across Canada and hope that in every community, someone would be able to help.

I'm going to let Donna go ahead.

Ms. Donna Mullen: Right now, when you apply for a mortgage to buy a home, the rules have never been so stringent and inconsistent from lender to lender. I started working in the banks in 1982, when rates were 20%, so I've been through every crash.

To rent a three-bedroom home of low builder grade, generally with no finished basement and no extras, in Simcoe County, the average cost is \$1,800 to \$2,000 per month. This can be replicated throughout the country, based on population. A woman could buy a three-bedroom home for between \$359,000 and \$399,000, and costs would be similar to rent. This confirms “needs” versus “wants”. You cannot build a low builder grade home on a fully serviced lot that has no finished basement and no ceramic tiles, marble or granite for less than \$350,000 in this country.

We looked at the employment base in Simcoe County and the average wages based on a health care professional—RN, RPN, newly graduated, 90% women—personal support workers, and manufacturing jobs that are connected to the auto industry.

The RPN and RN are starting at \$28 per hour. There are no benefits, and your job status is casual. Please remember that term in this committee: casual status of employment. A PSW's starting average is \$18 per hour. There are no benefits, and your job status is casual.

The car manufacturing plant in Alliston is on perpetual contract hire. The average starting wage is \$18.92 per hour, and we just gave \$1.1 billion in forgiveness to Chrysler.

The auto glass manufacturing jobs start at \$16 per hour. The average starting wage when working for the municipality or county is \$18 to \$20 per hour, and it's not easy for women to get these jobs.

The hospitality industry is our biggest employer in our county, Simcoe County. Since tips were paid, the waitress has not claimed them on her tax return. This type of job allowed the women to get out and work while the man was at home. There was no day care and usually no stress with the man at this point.

This cash allowed the woman to pay for gas for the vehicle, extra groceries and extra things for children, and maybe save some cash for her to be able to get out of an abusive relationship. This cash could not be tracked by the man. These waitresses and bartenders take a lesser wage than minimum wage because they get tips.

I understand now that CRA has been looking into auditing the registers to see how much a waitress is being paid via a debit card or Visa. This is not an area that should be a priority to CRA. There are many bigger fish to fry in our country beyond scrutinizing the women who work in this industry.

When a woman is leaving a spouse because of abuse, assets are involved, such as the home. The woman is generally entitled to 50% of equity upon separation or divorce. She may also be entitled to spousal support and child support. Upon separation or divorce, she is also allowed to have her child tax benefit recalculated.

You're going to cut me off, so I've got to get into some recommendations.

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off now. It's—

Ms. Donna Mullen: We would like to make sure recommendations come to this committee, so we would like to table a report.

The Chair: What we'll do is make sure all of that information gets around, but we do have to move on to our next set of witnesses, if you don't mind. I'm sorry; the time goes so quickly.

We will ask that it be translated, if you would like to table the rest of your document. What we can do is ask for it to be translated and then we can circulate it to the committee. I see that there were 18 pages or so.

•(1655)

Ms. Donna Mullen: The rest of the report we would like tabled as well, in the whole binder.

The Chair: Okay. She's got that.

Ms. Donna Mullen: Thank you.

The Chair: Grace Costa is the general manager for Eva's Satellite, and she is on video conference.

You have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Grace Costa (General Manager, Eva's Satellite, Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth): Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth is an award-winning Toronto-based organization to provide shelter and transitional housing for young people ages 16 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness. Our hope is to help them reach their potential and lead productive lives.

Eva's Place is a 40-bed emergency shelter and the home of the family reconnect program. Eva's Satellite is a 33-bed emergency

shelter that focuses on harm reduction for youth who are substance users and are dealing with mental health issues. Eva's Phoenix is townhouse-style supportive housing for 50 young people. It provides educational and employment programs as well.

Charity Intelligence selected Eva's as one of Canada's top 10 impact charities. Eva's serves homeless young people of all genders. They become homeless for many reasons. However, it is clear that young people face systemic difficulties when impacted by violence against women and intimate partner violence; they seek supports from youth-servicing shelters and transitional housing providers that are ill-equipped to help them.

There are a couple of research points that I want to highlight that show the intersectionality between homelessness and gender-based violence.

The first one is that evidence shows that the majority of young people experiencing homelessness come from homes with high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse; interpersonal violence and assault; parental neglect; and exposure to intimate-partner violence. The lack of safety in the streets may cause young women to stay in living situations where they are at risk of gendered violence as well. Young men typically outnumber females in youth-servicing shelters. It's a two-to-one ratio, more or less.

Evidence supports the view that many young women stay in violent situations because the streets feel much more unsafe. Homelessness exposes young people to extremely high risks of violence. They are nearly six times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population, and they are targeted more than anyone else for all kinds of violent crime, including sexual assaults.

LGBTQ and two-spirited youth, indigenous youth and youth who become homeless at a younger age are at the highest risk for violence. Homeless young people are especially vulnerable for being trafficked as well.

Covenant House Youth, the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research and the Loyola University Modern Slavery Research Project of 2017 found that 68% of youth who had either been trafficked or had engaged in survival or commercial sex had done so while homeless.

Other information they found about high risk was that one in five of all cisgender women experienced a situation considered to be sex trafficking. LGBTQ youth accounted for 36% of the sex trafficking victims. Youth with a history of involvement in the foster system accounted for 27% of all youth engaged in the sex trade and 26% of all youth who were labour trafficked.

The Canadian Women's Foundation, in 2014, noted five factors for experiencing sex trafficking: being female and young, being poor, having a history of violence or neglect, having a history of sexual abuse, and having low levels of education. Other risk factors included the lack of local employment opportunities, being migrants or new immigrants and/or having low levels of social supports, being indigenous, being homeless, living in care or group homes or foster care, being involved in substance use or mental health issues, and having a history of criminal justice system involvement and gang association.

Youth shelters and transitional housing need support to increase capacity. In general, federal funding programming toward youth-serving shelters and transitional housing is very low. In Eva's case, we receive very few direct federal supports, even though we are one of the largest youth-serving shelters and transitional housing providers in Canada.

Young people escaping gender-based violence come to Eva's on a regular basis. These include those who face this violence themselves or are exposed to it at home. Adult women's shelters may be unavailable to them because of their age, because they are unaccompanied by a parent or a guardian, or because they don't know that they can access them. As well, in our experience when we have tried to access those beds, there is no space for them, even in Toronto where there are a lot more resources.

• (1700)

Even though young people come to service providers like Eva's, we do not often qualify for funds for gender-based violence alleviation, federal or otherwise. This presents a serious barrier to young women in particular, because it means we cannot reserve a shelter or transitional housing space, and most days or nights we cannot find them support from Eva's, because we are at capacity.

We're not certain about the hidden figures of young people who stay in situations of gender-based violence for fear of the streets. However, approximately 2,000 youths are homeless in Toronto each night, of which 600 are found in shelters or transitional houses and 123 are at Eva's. We know this means that young women may require youth shelters and transitional housing beds to escape gender-based violence but cannot access them.

Shelters are often the last place funders consider for meaningful programs, yet it is in the shelters and with the staff there that many young people disclose experiences of violence and trauma and reach out for support.

In the shelter we witness what so many young people need in terms of what we call "life skills", but it's so much more than that. In our shelters, we meet young people where they're at, and slowly, ever so slowly, they begin to open up about years of violence, and we often have to transfer them to someone else in the community for support. When we do so, we often shut down that very young person, leading them back into the old patterns of shame, fear, isolation and denial.

For us doing this work, it is more than clear that places like Eva's and other youth and housing providers need government funding, not only to provide spaces to assist young women but also to

maintain teams that have the experience, skills and sensitivity to support those young women escaping gender-based violence.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For our final witnesses, we're moving over to Alma and Tara. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Alma Arguello (Executive Director, SAVIS of Halton): We're splitting our time.

SAVIS of Halton is the only sexual assault centre in Halton Region. We service folks who have been sexually assaulted. We also do public education programs and have long-term counselling programs for them. We also have the anti-human trafficking initiative, a complete exit program and long-term support through which we support women who are ready to start living a life, rather than just surviving their life.

This brief is strongly recommending that survivors of human trafficking be conceptualized as distinct from survivors of domestic violence, and that instead of addressing the housing needs of survivors of human trafficking through a domestic violence, violence-against-women model, housing support cater directly to the unique, multi-faceted experiences of survivors of human trafficking.

In Halton region, a geographical area made up of Oakville, Burlington, Milton, Georgetown and Acton, minimal housing supports are available for women and children who have experienced domestic violence. There's only one shelter, Halton Women's Place, that is specifically for women and their children seeking refuge from domestic violence. As it is the only women's shelter in Halton region, many of the women seeking housing support services there are not survivors of domestic violence but survivors of human trafficking.

Survivors of human trafficking face distinct barriers when accessing housing supports. The trauma that survivors of human trafficking have been through is different from that of survivors of domestic violence. For this reason, the housing needs of survivors of human trafficking diverge from the needs of survivors of domestic violence.

Currently one of the most glaring gaps in housing support services of the shelter model is that many service models homogenize survivors of human trafficking and survivors of domestic violence, ultimately failing to fully address the distinct needs of both groups.

The following brief outlines some of the barriers that are unique to survivors of human trafficking when accessing housing support services.

•(1705)

Ms. Tara Setaram (Crisis Counsellor, Human Trafficking, SAVIS of Halton): Many of the violence-against-women shelters have strong anti-sex-work policies. These policies not only create another barrier for access for survivors of human trafficking, who may be taking part in survival sex work, but also work to stigmatize survivors of human trafficking. Frequently these anti-sex-work policies are veiled as a no-recruitment policy. Although understandable, no-recruitment policies gloss over the possibility that some women within a shelter may be choosing to take part in autonomous sex work and may need to rely on the information or connections of another autonomous sex worker within the shelter.

These policies contribute to a highly policed environment that encourages a panoptic surveillance of survivors of human trafficking. These policies also ignore the nuances of experiences that survivors of human trafficking have. Many survivors of human trafficking will have recruited for their trafficker as a means of self-preservation and survival. By blacklisting a woman who has been accused of trafficking herself, shelters alienate some of the most vulnerable survivors.

The conflation of domestic violence with the violence specific to human trafficking works to undermine the distinct trauma survivors of human trafficking must navigate. Yes, there are many similarities between domestic violence and human trafficking, in that both survivors will have experience of manipulation, physical abuse, verbal abuse, financial control—the list could go on, but these survivors of human trafficking experience higher degrees of sexual trauma than most survivors of domestic violence. For this reason, survivors of human trafficking need to be able to access a housing model that incorporates and operates with trauma-informed support and best practices. Within violence-against-women shelters, because of the volume of clients and lack of available resources, this framework is often absent.

Ms. Alma Arguello: Black women, indigenous women and women of colour who are also survivors of human trafficking are less likely to access a VAW shelter and resources, as they do not feel their experiences and distinct needs are reflected in this service model. Housing support model shelters need to be operating from an intersectional foundation to better address the needs of survivors of human trafficking who are black, indigenous or women of colour. This experience is especially exaggerated in Halton region, as demographically it is largely white.

We also recommend a centralized shelter intake in transitional support that shows where all beds are found and who can provide the individuals with safe transportation.

Shelters should not be the only places that have or get funding for transitional support. Folks who seek support are not all deemed to have had domestic violence or seeking support in shelters, and sometimes the old definition of intimate partner or head of a traditional family unit excludes same-sex partners or abusive siblings in the case of some human trafficking survivors.

Transitional supports should also be extended to organizations that work with the most vulnerable: sexual assault centres, women's centres, settlement agencies, indigenous friendship circles—which we don't have in Halton—PSN, LGBTQ2+ and transitional support,

trans support services, and seniors and advocacy agencies. The language needs to be changed. We need to look at the programs and the funding we provide from an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, intersectional approach.

We are still leaving behind the most vulnerable, even in the language and how we use it. What is the definition of “intimate partner”? Is it someone who has sex? That has to be changed. What is cohabitation? Is it someone with whom you have to live? If we just look at it within the traditional family unit, we will leave behind the most vulnerable of our population.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry. Please go ahead, Tara.

Ms. Tara Setaram: As a racialized first-generation Canadian survivor of human trafficking, I am bringing forward some of our human trafficking recommendations.

I also experienced domestic violence, and while exiting through human trafficking, I was placed in a domestic violence shelter. It was stigmatizing and traumatic, and I experienced a lot of victim blaming. My presence created a perceived hierarchy of victimhood within the shelter that resulted in a tense shelter stay. Residents questioned me constantly regarding agency involvement and the perceived special treatment that I received.

We recommend that transitional housing models be trauma-informed, have intersectional foundations, be harm-reduction-based and offer a continuum of care that's based on that non-linear path of healing that many survivors of human trafficking may experience. We recommend that enter and exit programming be without repercussion—so not being blacklisted—and that they be sex-positive spaces that don't try to ascribe sexual citizenship in order to permit entry. Survivors need to access housing supports that empower them and foster their autonomy.

That's it.

•(1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just to give everybody an idea of how today's going to run, if it works for everybody, until 5:50 we'll be doing our questions to the panel. Then we'll immediately go in camera so that we finish at six today. There is just a little bit of business, but since we have an excellent panel with so many witnesses, we will give them that extra time and take it away from committee business.

We're going to start our seven minutes of questioning with Pam Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to all our witnesses for being here today. To those of you working with survivors, I say a special thank you for the work you do and for the work you have done for many years, many of you. I give my heartfelt thanks to you, because it's not easy work, and I quite honestly don't know how you keep doing it day after day.

I'm going to start with SAVIS because we have had conversations about survivors of human trafficking and about them trying to find a place to live and get out of the life they had and some of the challenges they face. In our area, we have one women's shelter. I know that SAVIS has tried working with the region to try to get some transitional housing for survivors of human trafficking, and it's been a real challenge. I wonder if you could share with us some of the challenges that make that different and why you've run into roadblocks in trying to set something up.

Ms. Alma Arguello: Tara, do you want to talk? You work directly with them.

Tara is the crisis worker for human trafficking as well, so this is right from the horse's mouth.

Ms. Tara Setaram: Which part did you want me to talk about?

Ms. Alma Arguello: Talk about the transitional support.

Ms. Tara Setaram: With regard to the transitional support, a lot of our clients are seeking housing, but we're not able to provide it because we do not have a crisis unit. What happens is that we need to relocate them very quickly, so we're putting them up in a hotel, which isn't sustainable. They're not able to access the shelter. Some of them have been blacklisted from the shelter, which means that we have to move them out of the region, and when we move them out of the region, we move them away from the supports they have.

In terms of accessing housing through the region, if they are approved as special priority, they get portable housing benefits. What happens is that they need to seek an apartment rental, get a lease, and provide first and last months' rent, and then the region will step in and start making that assistance payment.

Unfortunately, what happens with some of our clients is that when they seek out that rental agreement, they're not given a rental agreement because they do not have first and last months' rent. They have low credit rating scores and their income is inconsistent or too low to sustain the unit. What happens is this perpetual cycle of looking for an apartment, finding one, and not being eligible.

We've tried working with the regions to create some sort of format, because this is creating barriers and a hopelessness for our clients that they can be housed.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Where are they going between looking for an apartment and coming to you? The phone rings. They're calling you. Where are they staying while they're looking for that apartment?

Ms. Alma Arguello: We have to put some of the clients outside the region. We have gone to Toronto. We have gone to Hamilton. I have driven clients as far as Windsor. There's also a huge systemic barrier when even those who are verifiable for the special priority.... Sexual assault centres are not deemed to be part of that special priority. It seems that the system itself has not caught up to the real needs of folks who are experiencing this type of victimization.

One of the systemic barriers is that it is not being put as verifiable that these women have experienced this type of heinous crime. That also holds up the application a bit longer. It takes that much time. Some folks have been denied, and the appeal process takes that much longer, so we have to put them outside of the region to a shelter that has some transitional support, which re-victimizes them even more.

We're able to allow them to have housing after we have jumped through all the hoops. The system is still not there yet. The survivors of human trafficking are still being victimized and stigmatized even after they exit.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Are these shelters that offer special transitional housing for survivors of human trafficking, or are they—

Ms. Alma Arguello: Some of them are, and some of them are not.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Where is there a good example of one that's operating? Is there one?

Ms. Tara Setaram: One that we've accessed and found great support through is the Native Women's Centre in Hamilton. They have a program on human trafficking called "Healing Sisters". That's one place that we've relied upon because of the issues we're having within our region.

• (1715)

Ms. Pam Damoff: What sets it apart? If that's a model that's working, how could you translate that across the country?

Ms. Alma Arguello: There are various models. For our community, we need a sustainable model, not just for bricks and mortar, but for folks to actually be able to own their own place and call it their own place, their home, and to have a really safe corner of their own little world. I don't think that a formal transitional support program or a shelter system will work for a lot of these women. Part of being able to completely exit and start living your life is having your own place, because then you're no longer just surviving. That's part of the healing path that has to happen.

It's about more supports, more transitional support workers and organizations like ours and the other organizations here, so that we're able to find transitional support funds to have transitional support workers who are able to go out and negotiate with landlords.

It's also to have in our region, the Halton region, the removal of some of the barriers we're currently experiencing when accessing funds for a lot of those vulnerable folks. That kind of model will work, because a lot of women do not want to live in a shelter. It's very traumatic for them as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have about a minute left, but this came up in our last meeting, and Megan, you mentioned that we need to prevent this from happening in the first place.

One of the programs you run is the Male Ally Network. Can you tell us quickly about that?

Ms. Alma Arguello: The Male Ally Network is a program that helps young boys and teaches what gender-based violence is. How do we start teaching boys what is positive masculinity? How do we teach them what is toxic masculinity? The conversation has to start at a much younger age.

When we applied for the program originally, it was through Trillium and it was for high school. We noticed that we had to move from high school all the way down to grade 5, because in grade 5—they're only 10-year-olds—boys were actually becoming perpetrators of unwanted touching of little girls. That conversation needed to happen even further down.

We have seen huge success even in three years. We have seen success in boys actually pointing out bullying behaviour as bystanders and also in looking at young women and women with respect. In some schools, we have seen a complete cultural shift. In our community, we also have the male allyship tables, where leaders in our community come together and have conversations about how we make a safe space for young boys. These leaders are the chief of police, who is a role model to many boys, and the fire department, members of our own political community—

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much.

We went a little over the time there. We're going to move to Kellie Leitch.

Kellie, you have seven minutes.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the people who have taken the time to come to present to us.

Donna, you started to go down the path of some of the recommendations you have. In terms of what you were starting to talk about, I think they actually dovetail very well with regard to transitioning into actual homes for women. Maybe you could speak to that a bit, please.

Ms. Donna Mullen: As we all know, right now we have a stress test in our country that was put out by our current finance minister. However that came about, I don't get it.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Know that I have only seven minutes—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Donna Mullen: I know. I'm getting to it. I'm going to start right there. Please shut me up when you need to.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Keep going.

Ms. Donna Mullen: In terms of any purchase over \$750,000 in the GTA, Toronto to Highway 9, east to Highway 412 and west to Hamilton, and in Vancouver and Montreal, have no stress test there below \$750,000. Eliminate it. Any purchase of \$500,000 and below in all other areas outside of those types of centres should not have a stress test.

These are needs; they are not wants. You need to talk to some developers to see what the real cost of building housing is, from a serviced lot up to a house.

I have done the comparisons. Right now, we're all told that this stress test is going to help people in the future. It's actually hurting more women than you can imagine.

I'll go back to the casual status. Most of the employees in the health care system seem to be women working as personal support workers, nurses and RPNs. Due to the aging population of workers within those fields today and the fact that those workers years ago did not have equipment to help in lifting and some of the other heavy work, their bodies are breaking down.

To protect them, we put some rules in place, such that you can bring new employees into those fields—long-term care and other fields—but they can't be there to replace an aging population of workers whose bodies are breaking down. What's happening is that we have so many on short-term disability that these casual workers who are hired are working 40 hours a week all year long because you have people on eight-week vacations or on short-term disability. Guess what? Those women can't buy a house. They have to be there for two years to show an average income before they can qualify for a mortgage.

My first recommendation, knowing those industries, is that for six months of continuous work at 40 hours a week you can get a mortgage and buy under the \$500,000 mark with no stress test.

• (1720)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I'm going to interrupt again to go back to what I think Megan Walker and Alma were mentioning before, but also to touch on something that Marilyn mentioned.

One of the issues you raised was around whether or not we have people who can help these women transition appropriately. They're in a shelter, but they want to have a home of their own or they want to be able to transition out, but they don't necessarily have the skill set and they definitely don't have the help.

Marilyn, you were mentioning how real estate agents really do have to be sensitized to these issues.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: They do. There's no training for them right now whatsoever.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: My question is for you, Megan, as well as for Alma and Marilyn. What are those professions that we need to sensitize, and what are the very specific things they should be doing in their professions to do that? It's one thing to go out and train a whole other group of public servants, but I actually think if we empowered and encouraged industry to get involved, they might take some degree of responsibility for this and be able to help some of these women.

Ms. Megan Walker: Could I just respond to that first?

It's not specific to any profession. We have a huge crisis, and we need to be providing every sector with education and opportunities to help women. Whether it's the hotel industry, the taxi industry, the health care sector, the real estate sector—whatever it is, we need to be making sure that everybody knows how to respond to a trafficked woman who appears before them. That's always about choices.

When women are trafficked and controlled by pimps—their whole lives, sometimes—and they decide to exit, there should never be a wrong door. Every door should be the right door, and women should be provided with choices, whether it's a choice to be served in their community of origin, or in another community, or safe at home.

Of course, like everybody, I am all in favour of women owning their own homes. I can tell you that of the 6,000 women we served last year, there would not be one woman who could afford a house around the \$500,000 range. In fact, the majority of the women we serve are struggling to pay \$1,300 per month in rent when they have children to support and everything else. I think just a moment of reality and reflection is important—

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Megan, I'm going to interrupt you, mainly because I think what I'm trying to draw together is that you're saying the same thing.

Ms. Megan Walker: What I'm saying is that there's not one specific sector that needs training. We need communities across this country and individuals to understand the issues.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: You won't get a debate from me on that, not at all. I think what individuals, here at least, are trying to say is that we need some very specific recommendations on how we can move forward. I think we all agree that everyone should be sensitized to these issues and everyone should be doing their part, but it's hard to boil the ocean. We need to actually focus on a few things, and so some specific recommendations would be very helpful.

The second thing is that I do believe, from what Donna and Marilyn have presented.... Part of the reason I asked them to consider coming is that we encourage women to go out and rent an apartment, but if all of these policies that are detracting from their being able to own their own home were eliminated, they might actually be able to go down that path.

Ms. Megan Walker: I'm going to give you a specific recommendation, which is that we need to shift the culture by educating young people—we're doing it in our community in kindergarten—about the value of women and the role men have in supporting women.

I'm not going to shift your mind, with all due respect, on specific issues, when you're an adult man or an adult woman who has lived your own life in a specific way, but I do have the ability to shift the minds of young people. Frankly, I don't want to talk about real estate and \$500,000 homes. I want to invest money in education so that every kid across this country is learning the same thing at the same time, starting when they're five years old, and that's about trafficking and intimate partner violence and everything else.

● (1725)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Can I—

The Chair: Kellie, your time is up.

Sheila, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

There's a lot of wisdom here, and your testimony is going to be something we can draw on.

My first question is for the London Abused Women's Centre. At the last meeting we heard from the Beausejour Family Crisis Resource Centre. They said that at the end of the day, they can't do their jobs effectively if they don't have core funding.

Can you talk with me about whether that's also a barrier to service that your very effective group is feeling? More specifically, with regard to the current Status of Women Canada funding that's available, we're hearing that it's still competitive and speculative, and that the women's groups put a lot of time into the application and maybe are competing against each other, and it may not be long-standing. Can you tell us how that's working for you?

Ms. Megan Walker: We are really fortunate in London, and I think in Ontario, that many agencies that are established.... I say this with all due respect to Jayce, because her organization is not funded with core funding, while ours is, although we don't receive 100% of our funding from any level of government. In fact, probably 35% of our funding comes from the community of London, from individual donors, but we understand that we're very lucky in that respect and that most agencies don't have that ability. It's just a no-brainer to me that if you value the lives of women, you're going to appropriately fund those organizations that are serving these women and potentially saving their lives.

Secondary to that, you asked about Status of Women Canada. I can tell you that as an organization that has been established for 35 years, we're very disappointed with what's happening with Status of Women Canada, particularly given their enhanced funding. Most of the proposal calls go out for things like policy development or working across the country with agencies on how to best provide services. Frankly, I don't want to recreate the wheel. We already know what works best. I think that if you were to ask any of the organizations around this table about policies and best practices, you'd see that we already know what they are. We don't need any further studies. Frankly, what we need is money.

We are increasing public awareness around these significant issues impacting women, and every time we increase awareness, we get more calls. We need to make sure that all women are provided with immediate access to service, because all women have a right to live and to live their lives free from violence and abuse. We're failing those women right now if we can't serve them.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks very much. We're hearing that a lot. The more the awareness is raised, the more people reach out for help. What a tragedy it is, then, when women get told that they're on a waiting list and “we'll come back to you later.”

Ms. Megan Walker: In fact, women can't wait, because their lives change by the hour. They can't wait three months for a callback. They don't know where they'll be in three months.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: My next question is for Windsor-Essex Transgender and Allied Support. We had some really bold commitments made in the last election. The government promised to “give more support to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, and ensure that more perpetrators are brought to justice”. The story you're telling us is that this has been missed for trans women. Can you give us a bit more of a picture there?

Ms. Jayce Beaudin-Carver: That's for trans people in general. Sex work is one of the main forms of work in the trans community, so what we're seeing is that trans people are living on an income of under \$15,000 a year. A place to sleep tonight is a dream, let alone a house any time in the near future.

Many times, sex violence in our community goes completely unreported, because who's going to be responding to that call but a male-identified officer? Also, where am I going to be meeting with that officer? Probably in my community centre, because that's the only place you feel safe even to identify in your lived gender. I am the survivor of sexual trauma from earlier in my transition when I was doing sex work. I remember meeting with the officer and being told that it looked like my ego was hurt more than I was. This is a consistent kind of messaging to the trans community.

What we have to remember is that trans surgeries still are largely unfunded by our government and are seen as cosmetic surgeries. For a lot of people, one of the only ways to live in your true identity and to not live with dysphoria is to do sex work in order to afford those surgeries. One of the only ways to be employed in our community in a blue-collar city like Windsor-Essex is to do sex work. That's the only way you're going to change your narrative in our community. You can't get a job serving at Tim Hortons and be a trans-identified person unless you have somebody advocate for that position for you.

Are there promises made? Yes. Are larger cities maybe seeing some of the benefit? Yes.

We run the only trans centre in all of Canada. Again, we make this promise and then have to under-deliver because people are coming to our community to seek these services. What can we provide them but working within a system that's already failing our community?

• (1730)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

This question is for Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth. The unanimous recommendation from this committee a year and a half ago was as follows:

That the Government of Canada provide greater access to shelters (including funding, number of spaces, and accessibility) and legal resources for young women and girls who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and who are survivors of gender-based violence.

Can you give us a picture of whether you have seen improvements on the ground in the year and a half since that recommendation?

Ms. Grace Costa: In our experience, we haven't seen those benefits. In the last six months alone, we've had to access legal services through volunteers who work with our agency. We put in a number of applications for funding, and we weren't successful. Access to federal funding continues to elude us, and it's not just Eva's Initiatives; it's other youth shelters.

We're talking about prevention and education. We heard earlier that prevention needs to start at a much younger age. I am talking about education, and I'm talking about focusing on the young men who are coming up. I have young women and young men, as you can imagine, 16- to 24-year-olds, living at Eva's. They're interacting. We want to provide them with the services and supports to re-educate their frames of references and their experiences; to change the narrative and the experiences going forward, as was said earlier, but we just don't have the capacity. We continue to struggle to access funding.

The other piece I want to emphasize is that we've been lucky that at times, working with the police when the young woman decides to file an assault charge has been unreal for us. Trying to sit with a young woman who has gone through this process and doesn't get what she needs, which is very basic, and which is a validation and—

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm going to have to cut you off there. I'm sorry.

Mr. Serré, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask some questions in French.

I'd like to begin by thanking you for your input, which will be very helpful to the committee in writing our report.

We've been talking about temporary or transition housing, whether it be for a day or a week. That's the subject of our study. I'd like to hear your recommendations on two issues.

First, we've heard that there's a crisis and that more transitional housing is needed. That means more capital is needed. How could we work with the private sector to build more temporary or transition housing?

Second, Status of Women Canada announced an additional \$100 million in program funding. Which programs should be prioritized when that additional funding is being allocated?

I'd like to hear from the representatives of the three organizations. What would you recommend to address both of those points, capital and programs?

• (1735)

[*English*]

Ms. Tara Setaram: The government has already recognized that brick and mortar housing for foster homes or group homes puts people who live in those homes at risk.

One of the elements of our programming in Halton has been that we want to create a crisis unit and transitional homes so if they're ever found in those spaces, they can move. Because Halton is growing, our housing recommendation is that whenever there is a new build, the city could negotiate a number of rentals within that building to be allocated to transitional space. Right now what we're encountering is that they don't want to lease to third parties. That's one of our main barriers.

If people are building, then having spaces allocated for transitional housing supports is our recommendation.

Ms. Alma Arguello: Another recommendation would be.... There was capacity money that did come out. The two streams came out, and the collateral for it, but it excludes small agencies from participating. We are the only agency in Halton region that will be getting their crisis unit. That means we only have one bed between Peel and Hamilton. It's just one bed.

We cannot afford the capacity in an agency such as mine. We don't have the capital. Right away, this goes back to being systemic: there's the system and there's the block. We can't move forward, so we have to leverage partnership with bigger agencies. Fine, we do that, but then we have to go into the terms and conditions and policies and procedures of the other agency, which exclude people and are not necessarily operating from an intersectional feminist model. That is hurtful.

We are at a point right now that we are trying to work with the region to see if we can put a proposal forward and have the region help us out with it, but we also have to look at the integrity of the folks we're trying to assist. We believe that a scattered program is better, because it's out in the community and still gets the support.

Mr. Marc Serré: Ms. Costa, do you have anything specific on the capital priorities, and also operational priorities?

Ms. Grace Costa: Absolutely.

For us, it is the supportive housing piece. We don't have access to those funds. Our 50-bed housing unit, which is a townhouse model, is supportive housing. We can provide them with some supports, but certainly nowhere near the supports that the young women who come with these lived experiences need.

Again, because youth shelters seem to be almost lost from the map, we are seldom offered any kind of opportunity to put in a bed for those kinds of youth.

The other piece is that if I have a young woman who shows up at Satellite, which is a harm reduction shelter, and she's in crisis and her boyfriend or partner knows she's coming to Satellite, I have nowhere else to send this young woman. Not only do I put her at risk, but I put the other young people in that shelter at risk as well.

It's a losing battle. It's almost like I'm shuffling.... I'm calling places to try to see if they can move one of their kids over to our place so I can move one of our young women there.

Those are the kinds of experiences we've had.

Ms. Megan Walker: We partner routinely with the corporate sector. We use the corporate sector money to provide immediate access to service for women and children.

The corporate sectors in our communities across the country are very generous, but they oftentimes want to see upfront government money as well. In fact, most of the corporate sector that we work with want to see the government—for capital expenses—come to the table with at least 60% of the funds. That's not always the case.

A specific recommendation that I have for Status of Women Canada is to make funding available, and not only for capital expenditures. You could have the most beautiful building in the

world, but if you don't have the funding for staff to provide service, you may as well not build the building. Operating expenses need to be funded as well as capital expenses.

Specific to trafficking, trafficked women suffer a trauma that is unspeakable. Many of those women and girls will come and go from service. They will exit and return. They require different services at different times. However, one of the things we see consistently is that although nobody wants to live in an institution, those women and girls would like a safe place that they can call their home while they are working on healing. That means living with other women and girls with similar experiences while having access to programs.

Finally, really quickly, I think the government has to stop working in silos. These issues we're talking about today aren't just about Status of Women Canada. They're not just health and they're not just community safety, and until we can get those ministries coming to the table to work toward one solution, we're going to be here in another 10 or 20 years doing the same thing.

• (1740)

Mr. Marc Serré: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You're done, Marc. You're already 30 seconds over.

I'm now going to move on to Rachel—

Mr. Marc Serré: I just want to say that there has to be hope for men in their forties and fifties, so any recommendation—

The Chair: Marc, you're doing fantastic.

Ms. Megan Walker: I couldn't do this work if I didn't have hope, but I can tell you it's a much easier process to educate children than it is men in their forties and fifties.

The Chair: Okay, Marc.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: That's great.

We're now going to switch over to our second round.

We're going to start with Rachael Harder for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): That's awesome. Thank you so much.

So many questions, so little time. Here we go.

Donna and Marilyn, you can decide which of you wants to answer this question. During your opening remarks you said there needs to be a program for women specifically. I'm just wondering if you can comment with regard to the importance of home ownership for women, which you alluded to in your comments.

It's one of the things we've heard from multiple witnesses at the table today—that yes, shelters play a role, and they're the initial intake and providers of safety, but at the end of the day, we want these women to be able to find their way to complete independence, whether that be in the rental market or the purchasing market.

Ms. Marilyn Ruttan: We were trying to get at programs that aren't being accessed. These women don't know about them.

There's one right now with CMHC that will give you the down payment for the house. If you sell the house within the first 20 years that you own it, then you have to give them back the down payment. If you keep it longer than 20 years, you get to keep the down payment.

There are so many programs that these women who are coming out of phase two sheltering probably don't even know about. If we had a mentorship and could train these real estate agents and brokers in this course, the ones who choose to take it who want to take sensitivity training could help these women. It might only be 20% of the women, but then that's 20% of the women going from stage one to stage two who could now come to stage two, because you've moved 20% out of stage two.

It's not going to be in every area. Obviously there are some areas where the abuse is a far greater problem than in Simcoe County.

Simcoe County has a lot of programs set up to help a woman navigate if she wants to buy a home. At the same time, CMHC will give you something on this hand and they'll take it away on this hand by saying there are some restrictions to getting your mortgage. We couldn't even touch on them. Donna's come up with restrictions that need to be removed so these women can qualify for the mortgage before they show up at my door and I start showing them properties.

Ms. Donna Mullen: I'm not trying to show anybody disrespect for a \$500,000 home, but we have to look at reality and the reality of rent costs for these women when they leave the second stage of transition.

If we want them to be successful, we have to empower them so they can pay their own bills. That is the biggest empowerment for any woman today. She wants to pay her way, buy her own food, be able to provide for her children. That will give the woman the biggest sense of security that she can have in this world today.

If the rents are similar to what the mortgage payment would be, what better way to empower a woman if she doesn't have to fear moving every other year because a landlord wants to sell? She could do well with the profit, given the way that real estate has appreciated. We're looking to give that security. Policies in place right now are so interconflicted that women are shaking their heads, asking what to do.

As for building more units, yes, we definitely need more first-stage transitional spaces. We could never build enough for the need out there today. We have to start building programs that interconnect and move women out of the transition two status, programs that give them security in their own homes.

We have Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, whose mandate is homes for all Canadians. Women are the most discriminated against.

I will go back to the casual status of employment. I have included real-life examples in our report that we want to table. They are in there for you to read and know.

I know I'll be cut off trying to give you all this information.

I've done the math. This thing about Canada being a debt nation—I'm very upset about what you're doing to women. We have a Bank of Canada governor saying we all can't manage our chequebooks, and our finance minister thinks we can't walk out the door with a chequebook because we don't know what to spend our money on.

Imagine a woman who has an approval limit of \$5,000 who's used her only Visa to give her first and last months' rent so she can move away from an abusive relationship, but that put her \$100 over her limit on her credit card. All she's hearing is how everybody's stupid in Canada and can't manage their chequebooks. Is she going to feel comfortable going into her financial institution and asking questions? No way.

That comes back to sensitivity. Mortgage brokers will train themselves for this speciality or be part of this. I am willing to take this across Canada so women know there is a place to go and not feel intimidated or less worthy than the average, to ask the questions and have the same information to make that informed financial decision.

• (1745)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to our final line of questioning with Bob. Bob, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks very much.

The reference was made to ministries being in silos, and that's true, but also levels of government are in silos.

I spoke at an earlier meeting about city-owned housing. My first experience as a city councillor was canvassing in city-owned housing, looking through doors and seeing how people were living, which immediately raised my priority, even though I was 60 at the time, to single, senior, vulnerable women.

Also in those city-subsidized housing buildings, women were being trafficked and drugs were being sold. All kinds of things were happening. The security of the buildings was ridiculous. One building, a 200-unit building—I could give you the address—you could open by putting your thumb in the lock and turning it. People were coming and going all night. This really upset me.

The other thing we had was a faith-based shelter, which was really terrible. I was stopped by someone asking for change. I said, "Why don't you go there?" He said, "Are you kidding? You'll get killed in there." We, as a city, finally dealt with that by closing that shelter, in terms of beds, and finding safe, sustainable, secure housing for everybody in there. It was quite a project in the city of Hamilton. Joe-Anne Priel was the head of that project. You might want to talk to her about that.

Could you reflect, Ms. Walker, on those points?

Ms. Megan Walker: First of all, I was also a city councillor and was first elected in 1994. I ran on a platform of affordable housing and women's equality rights. Here I am, 25 or whatever years later, still advocating for the same positions.

It's easy to say that there needs to be more collaboration among all levels of government. It's much harder to do that, because every level of government has its own policies and rules around governance and around legislation. It's much easier for us to work within the federal system, removing the silos, so that we understand the impact of financial investment on the lives of women who live in poverty.

When I work with women and they go to a shelter, it's the best thing they can do for that first six or eight weeks, because it provides them with enough safety and enough time to seek legal support and family income support and to go and look at apartments or housing strategies to rent, but when we put all of the subsidized housing into one area so that we create stigma for anybody living there, we are failing women. That's been our approach, historically, as a country.

What I'm saying is that we need to have affordable housing. It needs to be legislated that every single developer who builds a building sets aside a certain number of units for affordable housing so that all women can access services across the country and their children can go to all schools and experience life, and other children can learn from their lives.

We're just ghettoizing women right now, and when you ask what we're going to do about it and how we address it, we need to really be setting legislation from a woman-first perspective—something that's not about patriarchy, not about benefiting men, but something that's going to really benefit women, however they identify themselves as women.

● (1750)

Mr. Bob Bratina: Right.

Ms. Beaudin-Carver, another experience I had was that I sat as the council representative on our LGBTQ subcommittee. That was a real eye-opener for me as well. I think a lot of us need to have a fuller understanding of the issues that you're talking about. I found out that so many of the kids were on the street because their parents threw them out because of their gender issues.

Ms. Jayce Beaudin-Carver: What I know is that we were offered an opportunity to work with the City of Windsor through a memorandum of understanding to be part of the by-names priority

list, which in our community is that one point of access for homelessness.

On the first day we went live, we had 10 youth come to get advice on that. That was the first day we went live. The majority of the services we provide are to trans youth, but we're seeing homelessness as an issue not just for trans youth. People who, say, are past retirement age who start to transition, who have been in marriages for long periods of time, are now being displaced due to transitioning later in life and see their marriage dissolving. They're finding themselves without employment, on a low income and without access to affordable housing.

It's not just a youth issue, but four times more youth today are likely to identify as somewhere within the trans spectrum rather just as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Trans issues are far more prevalent today than people are aware of.

Mr. Bob Bratina: The fact that you're here today is a significant step forward.

Ms. Jayce Beaudin-Carver: It actually is.

The Chair: It's fantastic.

First of all, I apologize for all of the delays that we've had today. I've tried to be a little more easy here because the conversation has been so incredible with all of the different witnesses today. On behalf of the committee, I'd really like to thank Megan, Jayce, Donna, Marilyn, Grace, Alma, and Tara for all the great work you're doing in our community.

I hate to do this to you, but we're going to have to exit the room very quickly. The members do have to do about eight minutes of business.

Could we have one assistant per member and one member from each party, if necessary? All the others can exit the room. We will be out shortly. I'm sure many of the members would like the opportunity to speak to you.

Thank you once again.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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