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—
Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1530)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.)): We have quorum, so we're going to get started. I'd like to welcome everyone to the 119th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I'd also like to welcome some visitors sitting in the audience today. We have some officials with us who are the equivalent of Status of Women in other countries. We have the Canada-U.K. working group on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as a representative from Australia's Office for Women.

Welcome. I hope you enjoy our meeting.

Today we're resuming our study on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

I'm pleased to welcome, from Habitat for Humanity Halton-Mississauga, John Gerrard, the chief executive officer. Via video conference, we have, from Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine, Marie-Ève Surprenant, who is the coordinator, as well as Fabienne Héroux, external services social worker, from Lina's Home.

We also have with us in the meeting room, from the Shield of Athena Family Services, Melpa Kamateros, the executive director.

You have seven minutes for your presentations.

John, I'm going to turn it over to you for your opening statement.

Mr. John Gerrard (Chief Executive Officer, Habitat for Humanity Halton-Mississauga): Thank you very much.

My name is John Gerrard. I'm the chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity Halton-Mississauga, a Canadian charitable organization with a vision to provide everyone with a safe and decent place to live.

You might be asking yourself right now why a representative from Habitat for Humanity is here in front of you today. I'm here because I'm passionate about housing and shelter for the most vulnerable. I'm here today speaking on behalf of my board of directors about thinking outside the box and about the collaboration and change we will need to make in order to build more housing for all.

I would like to spend my time today not addressing the stats, the people or the circumstances, but to spend our time thinking about the

solution and what we can do to provide more beds faster in a way that creates the long-term supports necessary for organizations that will continue to provide these critical services for years.

Sometimes a solution is so simple we don't see it because we all have blinders on. I'm here to tell you that a solution is very simple. It can be found today, but it requires organizations, including not-for-profits, charities like Habitat, to change and modernize, but more importantly, to identify what we're good at and what we should focus our limited resources on so that we can all work to deliver in collaboration.

Being different is challenging. It's risky and requires us to be disruptors. I would like to tell you why I think it's simple and why collaboration in recognizing skill sets is key to solving our problem here today.

What is the gap in my opinion? I believe the gap is where we ask shelters and transitional housing providers to become developers and builders versus program support delivery experts. How can we possibly do both things well? It's a question we've asked ourselves at Habitat for Humanity since I joined in 2012.

We have learned we cannot do everything and, by trying, we move further and further away from the goal line. We ourselves have to make the hard decisions and be focused on what I am proud to say our board wants to do, which is be a builder and developer in our communities for all organizations. This doesn't mean we have moved away from our mission, but what it means is that, by focusing our resources, skill sets and limited items, we can simply build more and faster.

I would like to tell you a little bit about an example. In 2012, we built one home per year on average. Today, in 2018, we have started 24 two- to five-bedroom homes with over 42 units in our pipeline today. The most exciting part is that many of these bricks and mortars will now be built and given to local community partners, including women's shelters and transitional housing.

Is this a change? Not really. Our applicants are the same as many of the organizations with which we partner today have. In fact, most of the people on our 100-person waiting list are the same individuals on the lists of 12 other organizations in our communities. This is not to downplay the need, because although we have duplication, we also know there are likely 3,000 to 5,000 people still in need of housing.

Why is this story important and important to tell? It's important because it starts to identify why I know the gap can be closed. By simply collaborating with our partners, we can focus our resources and spend more time doing what's best, reducing the need for more government funding and allowing funding and government donors to also focus funding in specific areas.

In fact, in 2017, we partnered with Halton Women's Place to provide units for their outplacement programs. We've just finished housing for Community Living and are in the process of building housing for Milton Transitional Housing and working with both Kerr Street Mission and Home Suite Hope, all charities that deliver excellent program supports for those in transitional or women's shelters.

This focus wouldn't be possible if we didn't have an engaged and passionate government helping to direct us to think differently. Without innovation and directed collaboration, our limited resources spread out to the masses will continue to deliver very scarce outcomes. We need government to drive organizations to be more collaborative and to ensure that limited resources are focused to the right organizations at the right time and serve the right part of the integrated puzzle.

Today, Habitat for Humanity can build a four-bedroom home for \$200,000 because we mobilize our community, volunteers, local businesses, government and strategies to serve more families. We have developed a social enterprise developed to grow our skill sets and grow our capacity all around construction and development. Now as we build 18 more units in Burlington, a project that will take three years to complete, we will see the community raise \$4.3 million of the \$7-million project, and \$2.7 million will come from the federal and provincial IAH programming.

Once the project is completed, Habitat for Humanity will carry the mortgages and manage the properties while our 12 community partners will manage and support the clients through their journey.

● (1535)

What I will say now may not put me in good standing with my peers in other not-for-profits. I'm here because we have to build more faster and the only way to do that is to focus limited resources to those that can deliver a long-term financially responsible solution. Giving us scale is what we need.

Solving the crisis cannot be done quickly and requires hard decisions at all levels of government and the front-line providers. It's important as I talk before this committee today that you understand we have already started a journey to come up with solutions to make this a reality. We have streamlined our processes and those of the other 12 working community groups. We have signed MOUs talking about how we will streamline our resources and services to work together collaboratively to build more homes, more beds and more shelters.

As a collaborative partner, we can provide the physical building, skills, capacity and build it more cost effectively. Halton Women's Place will focus on what they are good at—providing the much needed essential services to the women and children who come to them for help.

Today, this Liberal government has invested in one of the most important and critical elements of our society: housing and shelter. With the introduction of Canada's national housing strategy, "A place to call home", government has recognized the significant value and importance of housing first. My organization applauds the bold and decisive leadership you have taken. Your committee has the opportunity to engage the national housing strategy, make recommendations to engage and direct funding, and voice the concerns to streamline to allow us to build more resources for the folks that need it the most.

If we are prepared to offer \$150,000 to a rental unit, why aren't we prepared to offer \$150,000 to the development of shelters and beds? On a per-door basis, we at Habitat are looking for new and decisive activities that government can help direct.

I'm asking you today to recognize that there is a difference between a capital component and a program delivery component. Don't ask the specialists of programming to build housing, the bricks and mortar. At the same time, don't ask your bricks and mortar folks to deliver programming. The traditional players that have provided housing and beds are not going to be the same players in the future. Through government-sanctioned collaborative partnerships, we can provide the much needed support through programming and shelter.

We want government to direct and require collaboration, support and drive it. We aren't going to solve these terrible situations on our own.

In closing, I ask that you think about laying a new roadway to transition and shelter housing. Think outside the box. Government must also lead.

I hope today I've planted a seed that will grow through discussion, and maybe even some debate. I hope to take this away from our talk today.

Finally, I believe we are bigger, better, stronger together. We just have to close the gap.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

● (1540)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We'll now go via video conference to our friends in Laval, Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant (Coordinator, Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine): Good afternoon.

The Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine is a regional feminist group that collectively advocates for women's rights. The group has been part of the community since 1988. It was created to meet the needs of women's groups in the Laval region in terms of co-operation, visibility and solidarity. We represent over 30,000 Laval women of diverse origins through our members, who work with women in a variety of areas.

As a leader when it comes to the status of women in Laval, we work with various community partners to develop collective initiatives aimed at achieving equality between women and men and equality among women. For the past year and a half, we've been working on the strategic development of a first home for women in difficulty in Laval.

I'll now give the floor to my colleague, who will introduce Lina's Home.

Ms. Fabienne Héraux (External Services Social Worker, Lina's Home, Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine): Good afternoon.

My name is Fabienne Héraux. I work at Lina's Home, which was founded in 2005. At the time, there was a need for places because the population was already growing. Ten years ago, we were short 26 places, and we managed to create 19. However, after 10 years, there's no more space in Laval. As a result, women quickly end up in precarious situations.

This home is the newest of the three shelters in Laval. First there was the Maison le Prélude, then the Maison l'Esther. Our role is to take in women victims of domestic violence and their children. We're committed to advocating for women's rights, and we provide support. We take in women at Lina's Home and they live with us. We help them with all the steps involved in finding a new home.

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: We're very pleased to have the opportunity to participate today in this study of shelters and transition houses serving women victims of violence. Quebec must cope with a critical shortage of available places, and the situation is particularly serious in Laval.

Today we want to briefly describe the situation in our region and propose some solutions.

In Laval, as in other areas, many women affected by violence are denied assistance as a result of the lack of available shelter space or resources adapted to their situation.

The situation is quite alarming in Laval. That's why we've documented shelter needs in the region, for the purpose of ensuring safe transitions for women.

Unsurprisingly, the study showed that the services provided fall far short of meeting all the needs. We'll come back to this matter later.

We also prepared a description of women in vulnerable situations, and the results were released in 2015. It was demonstrated that, in 98% of cases, the organizations in the region needed to refer the women receiving support to other resources in order to meet all their needs. In 57% of cases, the women were sent outside the region as a result of the lack of resources.

It should be noted that Laval has no resources for women who are experiencing multiple issues related to violence. If women aren't experiencing domestic violence, there's no crisis or transition shelter for them.

For example, Laval has a population of over 435,000 people, and the city has only nine community shelter resources for people in crisis or transition. Of these nine resources, only three are single-

gender resources for women. These three single-gender resources are responsible for taking in and housing women victims of domestic violence and their children.

Only two of the other mixed-gender resources take in people who are homeless or who are experiencing multiple issues. These two resources provide seven emergency places, including two places for less than 24 hours. This gives you an idea of the shelter space available in Laval.

• (1545)

Ms. Fabienne Héraux: According to our latest statistics, 401 women were turned away because of a lack of places, and 205 women and children as a result of other issues.

While these figures are alarming, they only partially reflect the extent of the needs. They don't take into account women who were directly referred outside the region by SOS Violence conjugale as a result of a lack of space or other issues.

They also don't take into account women housed in Laval but referred to other resources during their stay because of additional difficulties, such as mental health or addiction issues. These women quickly end up outside the region.

Since there are no resources for women in difficulty, they don't have anywhere else to go. They must cope with a type of homelessness that involves moving from home to home. I once knew a woman who lived in her car for two months before coming to our home.

Moreover, when we have the opportunity to provide a place for women in difficulty, this means a change for the children, such as a change of school. If these women are referred to an HLM or another second step resource, there will be a subsequent move. The lack of shelter space in Laval is a real issue. It further victimizes women and leaves them in a truly unsafe position.

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: In terms of needs, there's a shortage of places. However, we don't want only buildings. We want comprehensive support for these women that involves feminist action. As such, not only do we need funding to acquire new resources, but we must also have the necessary resources to provide comprehensive support for these women.

In Laval, we certainly need more crisis shelter places for women victims of domestic violence and their children.

We also need second step resources. In Laval, we currently have only two second step housing units, and I must reiterate that the city has a population of over 435,000 people. We urgently need to support projects in development, such as the Shield of Athena project, which you'll hear about later. The project involves a first second step home for women victims of domestic violence.

We also need shelters for women in difficulty or for women who are homeless and who have multiple issues. These women have often experienced violence, and they need safe and long-term shelter.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I will have to ask you to wrap it up.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: Okay.

We need a variety of types of shelter, which are part of a continuum. This includes short-term and long-term shelters, studios that include community support, and, obviously, affordable and permanent community and social housing.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

We'll now turn to the Shield of Athena and Ms. Kamateros. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros (Executive Director, The Shield of Athena - Family Services): Thank you very much.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to participate in this survey. It's very important for us.

I'm here today presenting in the capacity of executive director of the Shield of Athena Family Services, as well as for the Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de deuxième étape in Quebec. My colleague, Madame Surprenant, mentioned our upcoming second-step project.

The Shield of Athena was created in 1991 by a group of volunteers. Our present network, which is considered suprarregional, because it goes from one region to the other, includes two centres where external services are provided and an emergency shelter, Athena's House, that came into existence in 2004.

I just want to say, a little bit off the subject here, that it took us 13 years to get the first shelter, and for the second step, we have been working at this since 2010. It's a very long and arduous process.

We speak 17 languages at the Shield of Athena, and we also do a lot of public education and outreach to communities. It is no accident that we speak in so many languages, because we want to provide access to information and services to as many people as possible who do not speak either English or French. If we look at the multicultural and multilingual reality of Canada, we see that presently one in every five Canadians was born outside Canada. Within 20 years, it is estimated that it will be one in every three. For us, language is a huge issue. It is the door of entry, and it is the thing that will allow people to have a choice of action—not action, but a choice of action.

Should this choice of action not exist for every Canadian? There's a basic inequality in issues pertaining to social justice within the system. We have seen this inequality because we work with a very vulnerable clientele. This vulnerability is particularly relevant in cases of conjugal or family violence, where even if a victim knows perfect English or French, she is often very reticent in coming out to find assistance.

Presently, 60% of our clients at the external are sent to us by the existing health and social services network of Quebec. One in every

four speaks only her language of origin. How easy is it for us to send that client to the shelter system or to have her benefit from the system's services? It isn't easy.

Irrespective of that, many statistics show the gravity of the situation with conjugal violence everywhere in Canada, but they only give a partial picture. This is because, as Stats Canada has reported, only 30% of cases of conjugal violence are ever reported. If we add to that 30% the many people who cannot report the violence, not because they don't care or they have no choice of action but because they are limited linguistically and otherwise, that number becomes very great.

How can we diversify and expand the existing shelter and services so that we can provide more options for women victims and their children who come from these very vulnerable clientele groups?

We have heard about the need to increase the number of beds, but in addition to increasing the number of beds and renovating existing shelters, we also have to think seriously about the fact that future federal funding should include the actual creation and provision of new services to accompany these developments.

At our shelter, Athena's House, as in many other emergency resources in Canada, women often come in the middle of the night, often with their children and always in great need of security. What happens to these women? In our case, we have limited beds. My colleagues in Laval spoke about the big need for extra spaces, but what if there are no service providers to provide information in their language of origin? Then all these services that are going to be happening are useless. We have an increased need for more places in Laval, but they also have to cater to a vulnerable clientele.

Regarding renovation, we find that there are huge time lapses from the time funds are requested and when the shelters actually receive them. Years can pass before the funds are accessed, and sometimes important things cannot wait.

● (1550)

As regards the issue of transitional housing, the single most important thing for women, all women, leaving emergency shelters is where to find the transitional housing that provides them with integrated services, with security and with the possibility to create an autonomous life for them and their children.

This brings me to my comments as a member of L'Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de deuxième étape. In Quebec, there are only 19 such resources. We will be the 20th. It took us eight years to come this far and we still haven't started the construction. We hope that the federal money will be directed that way.

The issue of double vulnerability is once again present in 65% of the women in second-step housing presently in Quebec. They come from an ethnic background but the service providers speak English or French. For those doubly vulnerable clienteles, there is no safe access to transitional housing presently.

If we increase the number of emergency beds, this is very good but it does not take out the importance of the transitional housing, because if we increase the stay for women in emergency places and emergency shelters, then we keep other women in imminent danger out. Again, we have to go and emphasize the importance of this transitional housing.

To this effect—and I will be brief—we recommend that the Government of Canada, particularly when dealing with vulnerable clientele, firstly, put more money towards the creation of more spaces in existing emergency shelters, promote new housing at both the emergency and second-step levels, and provide for emergency funding programs for very urgent cases that involve renovation and repairs. Leaky roofs and moisture between the walls will not be able to wait for years.

Secondly, we hope that a pan-Canadian policy on housing and conjugal violence can be created that is the same from province to province, that it includes the funding of services, and that it addresses the issue of violence against women from a global perspective and not from a perspective that involves only housing.

Lastly, there's more, but I'll be brief, I hope sincerely that the Government of Canada can ensure equality of access to services when the clientele is compromised in terms of language and other issues. If not, we're not an equitable system here. I believe that expanding the role of external services will make this possible for everybody.

Thank you very much.

•(1555)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

I was just asking if you provided us with a handout.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: I did.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): If you could email that to the clerk, she can get it translated and distributed to all of us so we get all of your recommendations.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're going to turn to our questions now and the first seven minutes I understand is being split between Sonia and Eva.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, all, for being here.

My first question is to Habitat for Humanity. Peel Poverty Action Group cited that families in Peel sometimes spend years on social housing wait-lists along with thousands of other applicant families. Are the families that you assist usually on a waiting list for social housing? How are the applicants for Habitat for Humanity's assistance given priority? Is there any special assistance or priority given to women, including mothers with children fleeing violence?

Mr. John Gerrard: Traditionally for Habitat, families have been the core and women and children have been the priority of our organization, primarily. I cannot specifically say if it's women and children fleeing a domestic situation, but I can tell you that probably 70% of the families serviced across the country are made up of a majority of single moms with children.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Last time I was there at the opening of a Habitat for Humanity house I saw lots of girls volunteering there. For the building trades you are giving the opportunity to women. Can you explore that?

Mr. John Gerrard: Certainly, we are very excited that we have partnered in both Peel and Halton with women in trades programs. We are very excited that during all of our builds young people are encouraged to come out and build on our projects. In turn, we have in our own organization two women contractors who are carpenters who are on our staff.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

I believe it's a federal program or can you—

Mr. John Gerrard: It's mainly a federal program that we work with, and then there are regional supports through the regional governments that we also engage. Then, in turn, we work both with the education providers, post-secondary and high schools as well, to integrate. The federal program supports the funding of the employment engagement and then what we hope to do is to hire those employees on but also use those new employees to also mentor young women in high school and post-secondary as well.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have more time?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have two minutes and 30 seconds you can use. You have a total of seven minutes.

You two can split the time however you wish.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Okay.

I'll go over to Eva.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): I'm very pleased to have the Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine and the Shield of Athena in my constituency.

My question is for Ms. Surprenant from the Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine.

Ms. Surprenant, welcome and thank you for accepting our invitation.

You said that your organization had 26 places in 2000, and that 19 places were added in 2005. This means that you have 45 places available for women victims of domestic violence. Is that correct?

How many women were you unable to help in 2018?

•(1600)

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: In Laval, there are 45 places for women victims of domestic violence.

When the 19 new places were added in 2005, we didn't meet our objective of 26 places. We were still short seven places in 2005. In 2018, these places still haven't been created. Given the rapid population growth and the arrival of immigrants, Laval is short far more than seven places for victims of domestic violence in crisis situations.

Our health and social services system hasn't conducted any studies of the population. As my colleague said, the statistics collected by our three shelters in Laval show that over 400 women and 200 children are turned away each year. This means that more than one woman victim of domestic violence is turned away each day. These statistics don't include women who are experiencing other types of violence or who have experienced domestic violence in the past. These women are systematically referred outside the region.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: My next question is for Ms. Héraux.

You work at Lina's Home, which is also in my constituency of Vimy. We don't have the addresses of your shelters in Laval, and I understand why.

Can you provide a profile of the women who ask your shelter for assistance? How old are they? Are they of a specific ethnic origin?

Ms. Fabienne Héraux: The women are of all ages and origins. They arrive at our shelter with or without children. The average length of their stay may vary according to each of their needs.

This year, we tried to make a list of the people who came to our shelter. Aside from English and French, many of the women spoke Arabic, Creole, Punjabi and Urdu. That's the most we could do this year.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: These women have a specific culture. Do you have specialized staff who understand the issues, culture and religion of these women so that you can provide better help? You have a shortage of space, but do you also lack resources?

Ms. Fabienne Héraux: We also lack resources. We tried to find people who can speak certain languages. However, most of the time, we work with the Shield of Athena, which provides services in different languages.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Kamateros, do you take in women sent by Lina's Home or other shelters in Laval?

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: A few years ago, we established a special service with the three shelters that already existed in Laval. It's a special collaboration. When these shelters send us women, we arrange a meeting with one of what we call our cultural intermediaries. These intermediaries are interpreters who work with the social worker or shelter worker.

The project has been working very well for a number of years now. I think that everyone is very happy with it. We want to provide even more services, but for the time being, things are going well.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much. That's your time.

We'll now turn to the Conservative Party. It looks like we only have one member here right now.

It's over to you.

The Honourable K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for taking the time to present to us today. It's greatly appreciated.

I've done a fair amount of work with Habitat for Humanity, and I'm delighted to see you're here and presenting.

Obviously, as a former minister of the Status of Women, I appreciate what all the rest of you have been doing, particularly to combat violence against women and girls.

My first questions are for you, John. Could you give us a clear idea of the specifics in the process for applying for these homes?

We're hearing from a wide range of organizations. They give us a sense of what their needs are, but at our last panel we also learned that many people don't even know that if they're in this circumstance, they can apply to CMHC for their full down payment and have it covered for multiple years.

We want to make sure those gaps in education are filled. Can you give us some of the processes for your organization, so that people are aware?

Then I have one other question for you.

• (1605)

Mr. John Gerrard: Certainly.

The model that Habitat follows is in three steps. One, it is 30% of net income. In order to be selected for a Habitat home, you must be working in some form, or a hard-working family of quality. With that, you must be willing to be a good partner. Finally, you must be willing to commit 30% of your income to your housing.

Habitat goes through a very extensive selection process—home visits, interviews and working with other organizations. In some cases, we now work with organizations and they help us select the families.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: On my other question, in the current programs offered by CMHC—which I know you end up accessing—what are some of the barriers that CMHC puts forward for an organization such as yours that we should be having a conversation about to make it easier for low-income families, particularly these single women who are coming from tragic situations, to be able to apply for a home and have a roof over their heads that they can depend on?

Mr. John Gerrard: That's a very good question, Kellie. I appreciate that.

The biggest challenge we face is speed in releasing of funds. That is clearly the biggest issue.

Projects are developed. They're presented and analyzed. In some cases, we could be waiting until a project is finished before we can access that funding, or the funding may change and it may come in stages.

The biggest challenge for many not-for-profit organizations is cash flow. Not having good, strong financial funding up front is what slows many of us down. If that funding were moved to the front of a project, I think you'd see a lot faster results.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: You're saying we need criteria for national organizations like yours, or even smaller ones, so that you know what it is up front. Funds could be released at the front end of a project, as opposed to waiting until the back end.

Mr. John Gerrard: That's correct, absolutely.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Ms. Kamateros, you mentioned quite a bit about the multicultural aspect and that you are helping to service women from many different backgrounds. You were going through a number of recommendations, and we didn't get to hear them all.

Could you outline what you think are the top three recommendations for our committee to consider for our report that we will be putting forward to the minister?

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: I did do the top three, but I have others. Some of them are really peripheral, but I thought they were important.

One comment—and I say this with a lot of belief—is that after nearly 30 years of working in this area of violence against women, I have also seen the impact that prevention programs have had in getting women to the resources. This is really before the women even enter into the system of the resources.

What can we do in order to give them this option of choice?

It isn't fair for me if I speak English or for you if you speak French or for somebody else who speaks another language.... I don't want to say a language, because I don't want to criticize or whatever, but if we don't all speak the same language and information is available only in English and French, then there's no equitable way that these people, the women, the communities...because we also do a lot of work with communities. I believe that prevention is done with the victims, but also at the community level.

My recommendation is that more of these prevention programs take place and be funded by the federal government. Also, at the level of Status of Women, I know that projects are funded, but wouldn't it make more sense that if a project that is funded produces services that are very good for vulnerable clients, the project could be repeated?

I know the provision of services is a provincial element, but at the federal level perhaps something could be done in terms of the projects that are developed. If the services developed from these projects are good, maybe then that funding could be repeated.

• (1610)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Our colleagues from Laval, I would like to ask you a question. I apologize, I'll ask in English because I have a short period of time. My French would probably take up all the time. I'm assuming you have translation.

Your organization talks about an action plan to help women in vulnerable situations. I was wondering if you could tell us what you think those key one or two areas are that we should focus on for our report, which you have found the most valuable in helping the women in Laval.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: As I was saying earlier, we really need to implement new shelter resources to manage both crisis and transition situations, not only for women victims of domestic violence, but also for women who are experiencing multiple issues.

In Laval, the challenge is really to be in a position to consider the full background of the women and to have the necessary resources to

help them not only cope with the continuum of violence, but also manage their mental health, addiction and financial insecurity issues. We also want to ensure that women from cultural communities, women with disabilities and women who are deaf can access our services.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Now we turn to the NDP for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

To both the Shield of Athena and to the Laval representatives, because you're both doing the front-line services and working directly with women who are seeking shelter from domestic violence, can you talk with us a little bit about the economic considerations and the interruptions in women's lives when they are considering leaving a dangerous situation, either coming physically into the first-level shelter or else just making the decision to leave their spouse?

We've been hearing from other witness testimony about the economic insecurity, the tendency when a women leaves an abusive relationship to put herself and her children into poverty.

Could you talk a bit about what you're hearing there, and then related to that, how paid leave from work might cover a woman? Five days is what is being proposed by this government just a couple of days ago. Back in 2004, I think, the Philippines did this. New Zealand has had it for quite some time. Many provinces in Canada have paid leave for victims of domestic violence, which might give them more confidence about the economic security for them and their children, and then give them that extra support in leaving a dangerous place.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: The idea of paid leave is good. It's a wonderful idea, but many of the women we work with who present within our network, in Laval in general as well in Montreal, come from various communities where little English or French is spoken. The idea of course of financial dependence is something that keeps them from leaving. Of course it does, but the idea of finding a job as well, I mean.... How can we refer women to employability programs who cannot even understand the language that is being spoken? We accept people in Canada, and we have to educate more.

This is one of the recommendations that I put in as well. We have to provide more training to service providers and to health care professionals, so that they can direct these women to venues, to areas that can help them perfect skills and learn a language. Actually, I have to say that a lot of the prevention work we do is directly through the French-language francization courses. That is a very good area where we can sort of give out the information.

The reality is that there's a lot of financial dependency. One of the first things the women get to do when they come to the shelter, if they don't have any money, is apply to welfare because for a certain time it's only through welfare that they can subsist with their children. Part of the need for the transitional homes is so that the woman can be given some time so she can go through an educational period. She can go through an employability session and eventually become autonomous.

There's no clear-cut easy solution. I think the paid benefits are great, but what happens to women who are not working and can't work for a while?

•(1615)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Just to be clear, I understand and appreciate the clientele with whom you are specifically working. In this case, this is a woman who has a job already, but there will be an interruption in her ability to work.

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: Exactly.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Very good clarification, there are two types.

Is there anything from the Laval organization?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: We think that it's an excellent idea to grant paid leave to women victims of domestic violence. However, we believe that it would be in the women's interest if the leave were significantly longer than the five days proposed. We've noticed that, in many cases, post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health issues or physical disorders arise once the women are in a safe environment and able to have some rest.

It's extremely difficult to keep a job when you're a victim of domestic violence. If these women want to return to the job market or keep their jobs, they must have enough time to rebuild their lives and regain power. Domestic violence is still an extremely taboo subject, not only in society, but also in the workplace. In short, leave must indeed be granted. However, for these measures to be effective, a great deal of awareness and prevention work must be carried out.

[English]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: If I can turn back to the Shield of Athena, you also talked about the importance of having a quality of access to service, and that you are not seeing that. Can you expand on what the impact is then on women and their children when there is no equal access geographically or amongst language groups?

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: The option of choice is not there. Most of the time when we hear or when we read about, or when we put on the television, we find out about the issue of conjugal violence because we have the door of entry which is language, either French or English.

Imagine when you live a situation of violence and the victim is encircled by that situation of abuse, which is all the various forms that abuse can have. The woman is also encircled by a circle of powerlessness, because she doesn't have the language skills. She doesn't know the system. She doesn't know where she can go for assistance. She doesn't even know that she is a victim most of the time.

This comes out a lot in the outreach sessions we do, because after we explain what the cycle is and the types of abuse, women begin to say, "Oh, I'm a victim. I'm not crazy. I'm a victim of conjugal violence." When the woman is a victim, who doesn't speak the language, and is encircled, not only with the violence but all the blockages that keep her from making a choice, this is what we mean. How equitable is her situation in terms of somebody else who does speak the language?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I will just finish with a quick question to the Habitat for Humanity witness.

Thank you for your work. You are providing a lot of service to women and children. Do you know their path before they get to you? Are they victims of domestic violence?

Mr. John Gerrard: We don't know 100%. I can't answer that 100% accurately. There are a number of individuals who come to us through organizations. As my colleague beside me has indicated, in some cases they may not meet all the criteria that we normally require, if they are in a precarious employment situation and leaving. However, for the most part, yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Ms. Lambropoulos, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I would like to thank all of the witnesses for being here with us today to answer our questions on this very important subject.

I'm going to begin with the Shield of Athena since many of the clients are actually members of my own riding and community. You touched on the fact that you service people in 17 different languages, something that we know is incredibly important, especially on the Island of Montreal and in other city centres around Canada.

What steps did your organization take in order to service people in these 17 different languages, and what do you specifically recommend that the government do to help in this area? What specific type of recommendation can we give the government in order to make sure that services are provided to a diverse clientele?

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: At the Shield of Athena, we've always worked with the communities as well as the victims. We've found that when we work with the communities, we take a more inclusive approach and we educate more people on what violence against women is, particularly conjugal violence, what the consequences are and what the resources are.

I find that the prevention programs—and again I go back to this, because for us education is extremely important—are the first part of this linear progression for the woman in any case. It is the first step for the woman entering the system, but it is also a step towards bringing back a type of social consciousness to the community. We're educating not only the victims but the communities. For us, it's very important that the Government of Canada do this preparatory step before people are funnelled into the system.

I think I cited a statistic that only 30% of the cases of violence are reported. Where are the other 70%? How can we get the 70% to come out and say, "I'm a victim" or "I want to help a victim", or "Can we direct the victims to this resource?" I think that is step number one. For us, public awareness is always step number one. So is the provision of services in a multilingual format. We cannot expect people to come to us. We have to be out there, we have to make this information available and we have to make it available in their language of origin. In the same way that we make this information available in the language of origin, we have to make intervention available in the language of origin.

Imagine how difficult it is for an intervention with a woman who is a victim of family violence. We call it a tripartite invention. We've educated what we call cultural intermediaries—or interpreters—to be able to participate in this. So it's the social worker to the cultural intermediary, the cultural intermediary to the client, the client back to the cultural intermediary and then the cultural intermediary back to the client. It's long, it's arduous, it's very, very challenging and it gets the work done.

I would say we need more information in the language of origin, more intervention—possibly in the language of origin—and more partnering up with existing resources. I always cite the pilot project that we did with the shelters in Laval. It's fabulous. We get things done that way. The shelters can accept a lot of the women there. We give our linguistic services and we do service a lot of people.

• (1620)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

You mentioned that not enough people come forward, only 30% do, and you work with these people on a daily basis. I was wondering if you had any ideas of how we can get more women to come forward. Also, people have actually come to my riding office and told me the reasons they don't go to shelters. They've given me their stories and told me why they don't go to shelters, and they're saying it's because they're afraid of losing their children in the process. What do you tell people who come to your shelter who have this fear? How do you comfort them?

Ms. Melpa Kamateros: We're very lucky in that we began with the external services. Not all women want to go to shelters. It took us 13 years to make our shelter, but during that time, we always had the external. A lot of women would rather go to an external service than uproot themselves and go to a shelter. Having said that, the only place for a woman and her children, when there's a palpable danger, is in a shelter.

How can we get women both to the external services and to the shelters? Again, we can do it by providing information in the language of origin, by going through the school boards and by going to the media. We did huge programs in the ethnic media where we got a lot of information out to ethnic communities. There are various ways. I know it's hard for women to come out because it has to do with an intimate relationship, a relationship with somebody else, and even if I speak English and you speak French, it's very difficult. Imagine how much more difficult it is for women who do not speak the language.

I hope I answered the question.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: John, the last question is for you.

You mentioned that you would like to see the government take a lead in getting organizations to work collaboratively so that they can focus on their strengths and get more done. How do you suggest we do that? What are your recommendations?

Mr. John Gerrard: If we look at Habitat for Humanity, the idea would be to encourage, if not direct, that collaborative approach among organizations first, to find the right partner.

Through any funding model, you could hopefully encourage collaboration as a primary opportunity and ask those folks, whether there's funding at the front end or not, if they are able to create a collaborative that is going to save money and build faster. I think there are ways you can solve the demand and supply issue faster than we are today just by changing the funding requirements.

• (1625)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

We have only five minutes left, so the clerk suggested we could go to one question for each party.

Kellie, would you start? Then we'll have Sheila and I am going to use the chair's prerogative and take the last question for the Liberal Party, if that's okay.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: If there are only five minutes why don't you start, Pam, and have your question and then if there is time left we'll continue.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Okay.

John, you have worked with Halton Women's Place, which is the only women's shelter in Halton. They don't have enough space for the women who are there, so as a result they have to turn women away.

I wonder if you could talk a little about that partnership, because I think when people think of Habitat, they think of one family, one house. Maybe also, how are you doing a rent-to-own model, and could you expand on what types of housing you're providing?

Mr. John Gerrard: Thank you, Pam.

Habitat is changing its model. It has to change its model to serve more families for our mission. We are implementing new programs that meet a growing, diverse audience. That includes organizations like women's shelters and transitional housing.

You mentioned Halton Women's Place. We have now provided them with three locations where they provide secondary transitional programming. They select the clients who will go into those homes and support them. We manage the mortgage and we manage the relationship, but they manage the client involvement there. I think that's a fundamental difference in where we're headed.

We're now starting to enter into different models of mortgage lending. In the past we were very much focused on home ownership. We continue to be primarily focused on that; however, we are now offering alternative strategies to allow mobilization of individuals in precarious situations who may want to move, who need a temporary solution, but want to take the equity they have contributed and eventually relocate to better themselves and be more successful. That's through our new deferred home ownership or rent-to-own program.

Finally, I think the change we're doing as an organization is that we're now building physical buildings for organizations. That's where we are able to mobilize our strengths and provide housing for the client to be able to use in their need, not ours. Working collaboratively, we're going to be more successful.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I have just one other quick question.

Kellie touched on the issues with CMHC, and you and I have had that conversation as well. How do you make sure that if an organization gets the funding up front, as opposed to at the back end, that the money is spent, and in the way it was intended? Do you have any suggestions around that?

Mr. John Gerrard: I think the predominant challenge with funding at the front end has always been: What will the organization do? Will they apply it accordingly, or will they use it in some operating fund that is not utilized?

I think there are certain regulations within even the IAH funding model that do require organizations to provide certain requirements and criteria, legal documentation and agreements that hold the organization accountable. I think we have to make sure those are the leading drivers, Pam, but also I think some legal precedents have to be set for partnerships and organizations. We're registered charities or not-for-profits in a lot of cases, so I think having a more substantial legal agreement is also an opportunity for us.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

Yes.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: The one question I want to ask the other two organizations, which John has already responded to, is this. Both organizations talk of collaboration as well, and it would be outstanding to be able to get your input on what you think are those key components of collaboration that should be focused on.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Fabienne Héroux: What is special about Laval is that organizations want to work together, in partnership. We do a lot of collaborative work. The three homes receive women who are victims of domestic violence. So we try to pool our funds to raise awareness and to be able to receive and support women who turn to one of our organizations.

We will soon undertake awareness-raising activities, as we do every year. One of the issues we will talk about is an invisible form of violence—psychological violence. In Laval, we can raise awareness in subway stations, on buses and through radio stations. The goal is to educate as many residents of our island as possible, who are part a growing and diverse population. We want people to be aware of the available resources.

•(1630)

Ms. Marie-Ève Surprenant: Concerning the building of shelters, all the organizations that are working on housing projects must absolutely use collaboration and partnerships. We are actually not developers. We must all establish relationships with private sector developers or community developers. Partnerships are essential, and funding is a key issue.

As Ms. Kamateros mentioned, the process is long and arduous. Funding is late, and organizations are the ones that support projects on a volunteer basis. No funding is provided for ensuring project coordination, the development of the financing package, or for the search for land. So the groups do all the work preliminary to construction by providing human and financial resources. That is the really difficult part for organizations and it means that projects take time to develop.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're going to suspend for a couple minutes. We need to set up a new panel by teleconference, and we'll be back in two minutes.

•(1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1635)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Welcome back to the 119th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I would like to welcome all of our guests.

For the second hour, I am pleased to welcome, from Antigonish Community Transit, Travis DeCoste, a housing support worker at "A Roof Over Your Head". From Horizons Women's Centre we have Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, director. From the Island Crisis Care Society, we have Violet Hayes, executive director, also by video conference. Here with us in our final panel is Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, with Chantal Arseneault, the president, and Louise Riendeau, co-responsible for political issues.

We'll start with Antigonish Community Transit.

Travis, we'll go over to you for seven minutes.

Mr. Travis DeCoste (Housing Support Worker, A Roof Over Your Head, Antigonish Community Transit): Good evening, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I would like to take a moment to offer my gratitude and state what an honour it is to sit before you in our nation's capital to present in regard to the study of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women.

To begin with an introduction, my name is Travis DeCoste, and I am currently employed as a housing support worker for "A Roof Over Your Head", a project of the Antigonish Community Transit Society. The project currently serves the counties of Antigonish and Guysborough within Nova Scotia. The clients who use our programs are most often referred, and present with issues surrounding homelessness and housing insecurity.

The number of individuals in need of housing support in Antigonish and Guysborough counties continues to grow and is sometimes overwhelming. That said, included in this growing number is women and children affected by domestic and intimate partner violence.

Since taking on my role as housing support worker for “A Roof Over Your Head”, multiple files have been referred from partnering agencies that see clients experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity due to some aspect of domestic and intimate partner violence. Today my hope is to offer the committee recommendations through the lens of my perspective, which includes current and past roles, and most importantly, my personal lived experience.

In May 2001, the dynamic of my family forever changed when my mother found the strength and the courage to reach out and ask for help. My family was living through the pain and hurt caused by domestic and intimate partner violence, and help came for us in the way of the Leaside transition shelter in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia. Leaside Transition House offered tremendous support to my mother during our family’s time of need, but at points, our needs were beyond the scope of the Leaside Transition House.

I offer recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for consideration pertaining to the concerns of my family, and many such as ours, during the time of our need.

One recommendation I would bring forth is that the government continue developing financial resources and support for women who are undereducated and underemployed to retrain and develop the skills needed to secure and maintain adequate employment to provide for their families, and develop a specific strategy to reach those most in need of this opportunity.

In my personal, specific case, after my mother ultimately went to a transitional society to ask for the help in regard to domestic violence, she was leaving a relationship where she was a homemaker for close to 21 years and didn’t necessarily have the employability skills required for the job market at that time. She didn’t have access to the resources to re-educate or retrain herself. Through that, there was a lot of financial insecurity within my home life and our home environment.

Currently, the Government of Canada operates the HRDC funding program for retraining through the employment insurance program. I would like to see a specific aim of that program awarded to women who are experiencing domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The opportunity would not only be empowering to women, to offer them the skills needed to move forward in their lives, but it would offer an aspect of self-esteem, which in turn would help them move through the process, the next steps.

My next recommendation is to develop topic-specific focus groups that consult and collaborate with community and service-providing agencies to create innovative and creative solutions to address the housing needs of each particular community.

●(1640)

Currently in Antigonish county and surrounding communities, our major concern is the lack of affordable housing. We reside in a town that has a university that brings a significant population to the community on a yearly basis. Because of that, rental costs are quite

astronomical. Current rental rates within the Antigonish community are, on average, \$500 to \$600 per bedroom. We have a very hard time finding family dwellings for individuals, because landlords are breaking their homes up into boarding-style houses.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I’m sorry the lights are flashing. The clerk is just checking. Please continue.

Mr. Travis DeCoste: With regard to housing, I believe what’s needed in Antigonish is a style of second-stage housing, which would offer—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I’m sorry, can I get unanimous consent to continue.

Rachel, did you say it is a vote?

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): There’s a vote for sure at 5:15 p.m.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Are you okay to continue? We’re not going to have time for seven minutes from everyone.

Travis, could you wrap up?

Could I get unanimous consent to go to five o’clock? Is that a yes?

●(1645)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: These people have come a long way and spent a lot of time. We should listen to them. It’s going to take seven minutes to walk across the street.

Ms. Pam Damoff: There are four groups.

Marc.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): We can’t do the other two. It’s not fair for the people who are here.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I move that we carry on for the next 15 minutes.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I’ll second the motion.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Are you okay with that?

Mr. Bratina.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Yes.

Mr. Travis DeCoste: Before closing, I would like to share with you a quote from a Salvation Army chaplain, Greg Armstrong from the Toronto Paramedic Service. Recently, I had the privilege to hear him speak at an educational awareness day on the topic of post-traumatic stress disorder in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The quote simply goes, “Hurt does not go unused.” Such a simple quote, yet it left a tremendous impact on me.

I have discovered over the years that little messages are sent to us in the form of words, experiences and chance meetings. I feel that hearing Chaplain Greg Armstrong may have been one of these messages during the time when I was preparing my thoughts for this presentation. I believe strongly in reason, and I gain solace and comfort in the fact of knowing that my hurt will not go unused.

For me, the reality my family faced allowed me to take my pain and hurt and redirect the trajectory of my life, and the individuals that I encounter within it. My lived experience helps guide me daily in my role as a housing support worker, and offers me the compassion and empathy needed to better serve my community. If I do nothing more today than open the hearts of the committee members before me, so that the seasoned experts of today's panel can assist in holistically opening the creative mind, then I have accomplished what I have set out to do.

I reiterate the importance of allowing for real lived experience to be a part of the solution, because who knows better how to improve the services provided, than those who have utilized the services themselves.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much, and I'm sorry for the disruption in the middle of your presentation. I'm going to turn to the other two witnesses who are here with us today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chantal Arseneault (President, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Good afternoon.

Thank you for having us today. My name is Chantal Arseneault, and I work at the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale.

The Regroupement has been around for 40 years. Its members are fighting for the right to women's psychological and physical integrity.

Our organization consists of 42 assistance and shelter homes throughout the 15 administrative regions of Quebec.

In 2016-2017, its members provided shelter to some 2,700 women and 2,200 children. They provided over 14,000 services and responded to more than 46,000 requests for assistance.

The Regroupement des maisons is very concerned by the committee's topic of study. The shortage of spaces in shelters is a crucial issue. Beyond the shortage of spaces, it shows in particular a lack of access to support services abused women need. We will try to suggest some potential solutions today.

In 2015, the entire Quebec police service registered 19,400 crimes against persons committed in a domestic context. Those offences accounted for nearly one-third of all crimes against individuals.

However, the domestic violence phenomenon is much larger. According to Statistics Canada, only 36% of women allegedly report abuse to the police. Women can also be victims to a number of other types of violence: psychological, verbal, sexual, economic and spiritual.

According to the World Bank, rape and domestic violence represent a greater risk to women than cancer, road accidents, war and malaria combined. In addition, according to the UN, violence committed by an intimate partner is allegedly the most common form of violence women experience.

Why do women need services? Because it is not easy to escape domestic violence.

Let me tell you about a woman who is currently at the shelter. Sylvie has been married for 15 years. Violence took root in her life when she became pregnant with her first child. At that point, the control wielded by her husband greatly intensified. He insulted her constantly. After the birth, she became increasingly isolated, and she stopped seeing people and talking to them. Her husband went as far as to control the amount of time she had for grocery shopping and forbade her from buying bread, among other things. She had to bake the bread herself.

Sylvie decided to end the relationship, but she became pregnant with her second child. She felt completely destabilized by that unplanned pregnancy. Her husband promised her he would go to therapy and would no longer cause her any problems. One evening, while the children were in the living room, the husband noticed that Sylvie had bought bread. Violence erupted, and insults and threats spread throughout the household. The children were hearing and seeing the violence. The husband got enraged, hit Sylvie, held her head against the kitchen counter and put a knife to her throat. The children were still in the living room. A few hours later, she arrived at the shelter with her two children.

You can imagine how Sylvie and her children feel. They are terrorized, panick-stricken, stressed, tired, really exhausted and very anxious. Sylvie feels trapped, completely powerless in relation to everything she is going through.

• (1650)

Ms. Louise Riendeau (Co-responsible, Political Issues, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Our colleagues said it earlier: the homes are more than shelter. The transition houses are, first and foremost, safe havens that provide services to women and children fleeing violence. Responders are available 24/7, throughout the year. Their role is to welcome and reassure women and children, help them recover their health and direct them toward other services. Responders obviously assess the risks women are facing and can establish scenarios with them to ensure their safety.

Domestic violence has short, medium and long-term consequences for women and children. In addition, that violence often continues after separation, contrary to popular belief. That is why shelters provide women with post-shelter follow-up services. Those women who face bigger challenges related to safety can be directed to second stage housing, when available.

In addition, many women who want to leave their spouse or are questioning difficulties within the couple, but who do not want to get housing, need other types of services. That is why the homes have implemented external consultation services to help those women.

I will now discuss the shortage of spaces in Quebec. Over the past few months, the Regroupement and the Fédération—we are two associations of crisis and emergency homes—have interviewed those in charge of 109 homes in Quebec to understand why they are refusing so many women every year. We are talking about several thousand women. We have received responses from 101 of those homes.

This study showed us that the issues are bigger in large metropolitan areas, and in the suburbs of those regions. Those homes have the most marked space shortages. So, in the Outaouais, in Lanaudière, in Laval, in Montreal and in Quebec City, the homes have refused from 5 to 17 times more women than the number of spaces they have available. In three regions—Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the Laurentians and Montérégie—the refusal issue is marked, but specifically in certain homes and not across the region. In six other regions, there was not much refusal, but we noted that the homes often had to receive more individuals than the number of spaces for which they are funded. That is also indicative of a space shortage.

The shortage of spaces in shelters in Quebec is a real problem, which is not surprising. If we compare the number of spaces per capita in Quebec to that in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, Quebec ranks last. So we think that the federal government can play a crucial role in resolving the space shortage problem in shelters and helping women live in safety.

Here are our three recommendations.

The Regroupement recommends that Canada establish a national action plan for violence against women and that it coordinates its efforts with the provinces and territories. We recommend that the government find inspiration in the action plan model that has been presented by various organizations involved with women's shelters in Canada.

We also recommend that the federal government ensure that the funding available under the national housing strategy really makes it possible to increase the number of spaces in assistance and shelter homes, and in second stage housing. Currently, we are unable to find out whether that money will indeed go to those resources.

Building physical spaces is one thing, but for responders to be available every day for years to come, money is needed, and that is a provincial responsibility. So we recommend that the federal government include in its transfers to the provinces additional funds to cover the operational costs of assistance and shelter homes, and second stage housing.

In closing, in addition to the huge impact violence has on victims, it leads to economic costs of \$7.4 billion. That is a lot more than an increase in spaces would cost.

A society that calls itself egalitarian must do everything possible to ensure that no woman is subject to control and violence and that no child suffers the consequences. Society has a duty to protect the most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.

• (1655)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We're not going to have time to get another full presentation. I'm going to suggest that we suspend right now and return after the votes. We have conferred with the chair who has agreed that we can have the presentations following the votes.

We'll all come back here immediately following the votes, or those that are able to.

• (1655)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1735)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm going to call the meeting back to order. Thanks to all our witnesses for your patience. I know we've lost one, but we still have the Island Crisis Care Society.

Ms. Hayes, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Violet Hayes (Executive Director, Island Crisis Care Society): Thank you very much.

The Island Crisis Care Society is a registered non-profit society that helps people in crisis to stabilize and then find the supports that they need. We also offer the resources and services that people need in order to be well. We work in co-operation with provincial and federal agencies, community groups and faith-based organizations to develop housing options and programs that respect the needs of individuals with multiple challenges or concurrent disorders.

Samaritan House is the only homeless shelter for women in the mid-Vancouver Island. We operate out of a 100-year-old building with many stairs and barriers for the clients that we serve. We also provide supportive housing at Samaritan House and coordinate and provide transitional housing and rent subsidies to help break the cycle of homelessness that many of our clients experience. Since we added these additional housing options back in 2013 through a project with B.C. Housing, we've seen how beneficial it is to have the option to move women from one type of support to another type, according to their needs. We found that the positive relationships that have been built with staff mean that it's easier for the clients to transition to more supports when they're needed, without feeling like it's a failure.

Hundreds of women are facing challenges in our community. The lack of affordable housing is a huge issue in our area because the prices of properties have skyrocketed and many landlords are choosing to sell and cash in, which leaves the tenants with nowhere to go. We are hearing from women who have lived in their rental units for up to 15 years and now must move, with little or no possibility of finding a place. Landlords with vacancies can charge extortionate rates as there is so little available.

I spoke to the status of women committee back in June 2017. Unfortunately, not much has changed with our challenges since back then. In fact, things have become much worse. Nanaimo has the largest tent city in B.C. Approximately 40% of the people living there are women. Some of them are very vulnerable. We still put as many women as we can on mats on the floor in the hallways of Samaritan House, but in the daytime they have to leave as there's simply no place for them. Our building is overcrowded and we don't have a lounge area for the women to sit, to meet privately or to find support from staff.

The areas of greatest concern are the access for women with disabilities, adequate support for women with mental disorders and substance-use disorders, and an ability to provide a therapeutic environment for clients. Eight women sleeping in a dorm with bunk beds is not very helpful when one might be experiencing psychosis, another might be high from drugs and another is a senior lady who has never been in a shelter before.

Part of the challenge that we face is that there are no shelters strictly for women escaping domestic abuse. Of course, many—if not most—of our women have experienced violence and trauma in their lives. Often the funding that is available is specifically for shelters with women and children who are escaping domestic violence. That is a very popular cause in the community for people to give money to. However, the women that we serve are often the very same women who have spiralled down and are now in even greater need of support. Their children may have been removed from their care or have grown up, and the cycle of trauma continues. When women come to our doors currently with children, we're unable to take them because we simply don't have the space. The plans for our new shelter have a place for families to be safe, yet separate from others in the shelter.

We continue to see older women who are facing homelessness for the first time in their lives. When you live on a small pension, it's difficult to find a place to rent that is affordable. When we are unable to take them in at their time of need they must find an alternative, which may be living in their vehicle if they have one, or sleeping in a tent. After they've been living on the street and have lost their possessions, and often much of their hope, it is much more difficult to find and maintain housing. For them to have the best success in finding and maintaining housing, they would preferably be housed within a month. An outreach worker can then support them and ensure that they have what they need to maintain housing.

• (1740)

We've been waiting for funding to expand Samaritan House for over five years, and quite honestly, if something had been done sooner, we might not be facing the challenges we are facing right now. There have been opportunities provincially for capital for affordable housing projects, but not for homeless shelters. An investment in affordable housing is imperative, but just as important is a safe environment where women can be helped to move through the challenges they face, empowering them to be the women they were meant to be.

I'd like to close with some comments from two clients whose videos can be seen on our website. Melissa says, "The house is a place of refuge for all sorts of women. People have to start saying, 'There is a problem here, a people problem'.... Take time, get the assistance you need and then you can go forward.... Heal your body, heal your heart and then go out". From Christine, "I think many just come from a place of trauma and it manifests itself in many ways. Trauma comes from not a very good place and manifests itself in depression, addiction and instability".

Thank you for your time.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We'll go to Bob Bratina for five minutes.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thanks.

Going back to earlier testimony, Travis, on the question of rental costs. The costs have gone up. Landlords often raise prices because the value of the property has increased. They have further costs as well as the profit that they want. Would there be any benefit in looking at tax relief for providers of shelter space, in your opinion?

Mr. Travis DeCoste: I do believe that there would be benefit to that. Right now part of my job is developing a rapport in relationships with landlords within Antigonish and surrounding areas and educating them on opportunities that they are currently not aware of. Part of my job is navigating through the community resources that landlords can utilize. Tax incentive programs for landlords to offer shelter would be of benefit within our community.

• (1745)

Mr. Bob Bratina: You shared a personal story set in a smaller community, which I suspect may be different from larger communities such as Laval, because in smaller places everybody knows everybody. Is there an issue for women escaping abusive relationships where it's virtually impossible for them to separate themselves completely from the abuser?

Mr. Travis DeCoste: There is quite a number of women who do experience domestic violence within the communities in the surrounding areas around Antigonish and Guysborough counties. Unfortunately, currently we have two transitional shelters, one in Richmond county, the Leaside Transition House, and one in Pictou county, the Tearnann Society, and both leave individuals quite close to the communities in which the perpetrator lives. For instance, because of close community contacts and family, the issue of my two parents in my personal story was that my mother was left roughly half a kilometre from where my father resided, and that caused issues throughout the early stages of the process and the court process.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

Ms. Arseneault, you shared one of the tragic stories. One thing that comes to mind is this. When you're dealing with these women, do they feel a personal sense of failure that their relationship has led to abuse? Is much of their problem in transitioning self-esteem and working on their own personal issues with regard to the relationship?

[Translation]

Ms. Chantal Arseneault: That is one of the first things we do when they arrive at the shelter. We reassure those women and their children by telling them that they are not responsible for the domestic violence. The person responsible is the violent husband.

The consequences of violence against women are lowered self-esteem, self-confidence and, finally, relation to self. That also extends to the mother-child relationship. We help them rebuild themselves during their time with us, which may go from days to weeks. They have their own identity, but because of the domestic violence they have endured over time, it is as if they could no longer see their full potential. That is what we work on with them, so they can get back to a life without violence and have access to all the freedom all women should be entitled to.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: As to the consequences for the abusive partner, how are women shielded from him, or is there a process in place where the police, or somebody, is able to keep the abusive partner distant?

[Translation]

Ms. Chantal Arseneault: In Laval and several other regions of Quebec, we are lucky that our groups work together. That is the best way to ensure the safety of women and children.

When shelters and women turn to police officers, it is important for them to be present, but it is also important for all partners to be aware of a domestic violence situation.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's your time. I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

Rachael, you have five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Ms. Hayes, I'm going to direct a number of questions to you. I want to thank you for being so patient with us, sitting online and waiting for us to vote.

My question is with regard to affordability. You mention, of course, that there are many women who have lived in their houses for years and years and then now, of course, can't afford them any longer. I'd like you to chat a little bit more about the affordability piece. Specifically, what I would recognize is that women initially might come into a shelter looking for safety and security in order to flee a violent relationship, but then their dream—I would imagine, in most cases—is to land in some sort of affordable, secure and independent housing. For many of them, their dream is probably even to own a home.

I just wonder if you could comment with regard to the housing continuum and what could be done to facilitate that opportunity for women.

• (1750)

Ms. Violet Hayes: It's a real challenge right now. As I mentioned, we've had huge success with the continuum of putting them into supports. Initially, they sometimes need that 24-hour support, then move into fewer supports, and then into rent subsidies. When we provide a rent subsidy for them, we try to find market housing that they can rent, and we give them the subsidy so that they afford it.

Our challenge, right now, is that even with the rent subsidies, we just cannot find anywhere to rent. We're seeing one-bedroom units going for \$1,100 or \$1,200 a month. Even if you have a \$300 or \$400 rent subsidy, you still cannot do it if you're on a pension or if you're just on minimum wage. It's very difficult. That's why we have such a huge tent city. That's why we're seeing people in desperate need. We just need so much more right now. Then the hope is gone and it's challenging.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Right. Is there anything that can be done at the federal level to be able to help move women along that continuum and into affordable housing?

Ms. Violet Hayes: Yes, the mention of the tax break for landlords might help. I know, as the value of the houses are going up, to find a house now for \$500,000, that's a fairly basic house now in Nanaimo. If landlords are having to pay a mortgage on the place and their taxes keep going up, they put the rent up as much as they can. We just had the latest announcement for how much the rent could go up next year, and it was 4.5%. That's a big jump, but the bigger issue, of course, is when the people are moved out, for whatever reason. Maybe they say they're going to do renovations and they have that ability to have the people leave with three months' notice, and then the next time it comes up for rent it's jumped up \$500 or \$600 a month. If there could be some sort of controls, that would be amazing.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Right. What about the centre? You mentioned some of the challenges you're facing there with regard to your facility, the home that you're using. Can you comment with regard to the gaps you're experiencing with funding and where some of those gaps could be filled in?

Ms. Violet Hayes: Yes. As I mentioned, we really struggle because we're not specifically for women fleeing abuse. There is a shelter that does a great job in town, but when it's full, we often get those women as well. I think it has six beds. We have 14 shelter beds and six supported units in our house. We could easily double that. We did buy the lot next door about six years ago in the hopes of expanding because we saw the need coming, but we're trying to do it ourselves. We keep asking, "Is there money available? When's it going to come?" We keep hearing yes, but it doesn't come. That's a lot of money to raise as a small organization.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

I'll turn now to Travis. I would be interested in hearing about some of your lived experience. That's unique for this committee. Perhaps you could comment on the importance of secure housing.

Mr. Travis DeCoste: In regard to secure housing, and to speak to your comments on how affordable housing could be created, we're now working towards approaching a developer in Antigonish to come up with creative and innovative ideas to address the housing concerns. We are looking at things as simple as shipping container units, which are used very frequently on the west coast in Vancouver and cities like that to develop as an option for home ownership.

It's very unfortunate, but being a young person now within the country, home ownership is not a reality that I can look to, nor is it a reality that local women experiencing domestic violence can look to. We would like to look at innovative ideas that could offer women leaving situations of domestic violence a supportive environment, a small, secure space they could call their own.

• (1755)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair, and my thanks to all the witnesses. You have given us a lot of really good material.

I'm going to direct my questions to Island Crisis Care Society. Thank you for your tremendous work. I'm a big fan.

You're talking about the homeless population in Nanaimo, which is significant for many reasons. You're looking after women, and we've heard other witnesses talk about how domestic violence and sexual abuse in the home can be a pathway to homelessness. If in an ideal world we had in place a good sexual violence prevention program and a good shelter space, then those women might not have ever ended up on the street at all. Now that you are catching them, however, the funding envelope doesn't work in the same way. I see we have some programming and some funding models to fix. Thank you for laying that out so clearly.

I read in the newspaper today that your group is going to be the operator of the new Terminal Park modular housing, 80 units, and the newspaper said it may well be that they are almost entirely women who come into that site from Nanaimo's tent city. Can you talk a bit more about how that might work?

Ms. Violet Hayes: We're very excited to at least have this option coming up. It's a lot of work as you can imagine trying to get 80 units. They are not even on site yet. They are being moved in. It's workforce housing that's being brought in from Fort St. John in the north. They have shipped these workforce buildings in, and now we're trying to get them all organized, trying to hire the staff and get people moved in.

It will be supportive housing, which is wonderful, but it's 170 units between ours and Pacifica Housing, which is doing the other site. Of course, we know there are at least 400 homeless people in Nanaimo now, so it's going to be under half who receive some sort of support.

Along with that, B.C. Housing is working very hard and is putting in what I hear is quite a high number of rent subsidies. As I mentioned, though, there's simply nowhere to put those people, even with the rent subsidies.

We are excited about it, and it is a step, but so much more is needed. We desperately need that capital money to come in so we can expand Samaritan House and continue to support the women. When they come in, they are so vulnerable. They need to be built up and told that they really can do it. They have lost their confidence. We want to be able to take them in and care for them so that they are ready to move out on their own.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

When you testified in the context of our previous study on economic justice, you gave a very good statement that has a lot of material that would be helpful for this study.

Would it be all right for us to use your same presentation? This is from June 13, 2017. We could gravitate that into this study as well. That would save some time. Is that all right?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're not quite sure what you're asking, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'll just give you the transcript, which was on record at this committee previously, and it's already

translated. There is a lot of the same groups' testimony that we could get on the record and then draw on for our final report.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We can share it with the committee as correspondence. It's already translated.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Then could we draw on it for our final report?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Is the committee okay with using the testimony from the previous study and including it in this study?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It's just two pages.

Can you talk with us a little more about the experience you've heard from the women, the clientele that you're serving, the link between domestic violence, and how it is they became homeless?

● (1800)

Ms. Violet Hayes: Yes. It's such a common occurrence. You hear about the first time when they escaped. They maybe had some support initially, but then often will end up going back because they can't find the housing. We hear when we have to turn people away, "Where are they going to go?"

They're going to go into an unsafe situation. It's heartbreaking when we have people show up at our door two days later after we've turned them away because we have no beds, and they've been beaten or raped, or even worse. It's just not okay. There definitely is a link. I would say such a high percentage of the women we serve have had some sort of domestic abuse.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you very much for your work.

Thank you, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Eva, we'll go to you for one question and then we'll go to Rachael for one question.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank our witnesses for waiting for us while we voted.

My question is for Ms. Arseneault, who is speaking today on behalf of two organizations. She is here as an administrator of Maison L'Esther—located in the Vimy riding, which I represent—and as president of the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale.

Could you tell me how many spaces you have? What are the Regroupement's priorities when it comes to the shortage of 400 spaces in Laval?

Ms. Chantal Arseneault: Maison L'Esther, located in Laval, has 12 shelter spaces, and the occupancy rate is always over 95%. According to the statistics over the past few months, two women out of three are turned away from shelters. That's a lot.

I'm also president of the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale. Addressing the acute shortage of emergency spaces is a major priority for the Regroupement. As I said earlier, if women cannot find a safe haven in our homes, where will they go? That is the big question. That is among our priorities, and it is why we have participated in a study and consulted all the shelters. The reality of the Laval, Outaouais and Montreal regions is really a priority for us. We are trying to document the issue and negotiate with our provincial partners, but we would clearly need to engage in discussions with the federal government in order to be able to support women who need safety.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Is your organization planning to increase the number of spaces?

Ms. Chantal Arseneault: Yes, at Maison L'Esther, we have been carrying out a project in that direction for a few years.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Why are there no more than 12 spaces?

Ms. Chantal Arseneault: Maison L'Esther's project has a goal to increase the number of spaces. However, we are having trouble obtaining permits for expansion or finding adequate land. In reality, in addition to fulfilling my task, I must also search for land.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Can I ask one last question, Madam Chair?
[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm sorry. It's over to Rachael. It was just one question. You had two.

Go ahead, Rachael.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. Hayes, I'm coming back to you.

Can you expand on what it would look like to help women successfully live independently?

Access to affordable housing is one thing. The monetary portion of that of course is a necessity. One of the things that we've heard from other witnesses as well is providing these women with the

support they need to be able to live independently. There's a lot more that goes into it than just the monetary piece.

Can you comment on that further with regard to the support that these women require in order to live vibrant lives?

Ms. Violet Hayes: That's where we've seen women blooming, when you can bring staff alongside and just really encourage them and help them.

There are different levels of housing, and when we move the women into.... It's in the north end of Nanaimo and it's close to the biggest mall. It's just a regular house. It has six bedrooms. Six of the women live together in that home. Then we have an outreach worker who goes in daily and just checks in with them, just to tell them that they believe in them and that they can help them get into schooling.

We've had people who have gone back to school and started jobs. Most of the women there are working at the mall, whether it be cleaning in the cinema or working in the food court or one of the stores. It just gives them that confidence to say, yes, we can do this. They just need that at this point in their lives, when they've been downtrodden and they've gone through the abuse and just don't have that hope anymore. It's so key to have those relationships, and that's why we've found that with the multi-levels of housing and the same staff being able to move through with them we've had the most success.

● (1805)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank all our witnesses for being here and also for your patience in accommodating us while we went to vote. Your testimony will be very helpful in our study.

With that, we are adjourned.

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