



Chair, Marcel Beaubien
The Standing Committee,
Finance and Economic Affairs
1405 Whitney Block
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Toronto Ont.
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February 20, 2002

Dear Mr. Beaubien and the members of the Committee:

The YWCA welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the pre-budget process in the province of Ontario.

Who we are

The YWCA is one of the oldest women's voluntary associations in Canada. Since our national founding in the 1870's, we have grown to a member-based organization active in over 21 communities in Ontario, with 43 member associations in Canada. As part of the World YWCA based in Geneva, we are a 25 million-strong member-run association represented in over 90 countries around the world. Our voting members in Ontario number more than 23,000, however, this is but a fraction of those whose lives we touch through our services and programs. In Toronto alone we improved the lives of more than 33,000 women, men and children last year through the provision of housing and shelters, employment programs, camping and outdoor education as well as community support programs and training.

We are writing to you to share what our Ontario membership and clients have shared with us: There is an urgent need to implement the recommendations of the 1998 May/Isles and the 2002 Gillian Hadley Coroner's Inquests concerning the deaths of two Ontario women at the hands of their abusive partners. Specifically, we ask that you focus fiscal priorities on affordable housing for women, and make a real commitment to the 1% Solution as part of the national housing initiative.





Our Services are Stretched Beyond Capacity

There are women in communities across Ontario who are trapped in their abusive homes simply because there is nowhere for them to go.

The YWCA women's Shelter in Toronto turns away 60% of the women who seek shelter at its doors because there is a bottleneck of women and children who have nowhere safe to go. In Niagara Falls, where we are not, strictly speaking, the emergency shelter provider, our women's residence becomes the overflow centre for women fleeing abuse. Waiting periods for affordable and public housing in some parts of the province have reached the appalling extreme of 12 years. Our own supportive housing projects have waiting lists that keep woman hanging on for up to 8 years. There is simply not enough stock of safe, affordable and/or supported housing in the province.

The lengths of stays at our shelters reflect the lack of alternatives for women seeking to raise their children in a violence-free environment: In 1999, we were able to assist over 200 women a year in one of our shelters. By last year, 2001, we were only able to help 150 women. We have been prevented from assisting the real number of women needing emergency stays, because shelters have become the only form of housing available to women seeking safety for themselves and their children. Statistics for emergency shelter use in the province show us that of the total number of families seeking shelter, 11% are women-led families seeking protection from abuse.

Abused women are prevented from accessing public housing because backlogs in the system have forced staff to resort to restrictions on eligibility that have deadly consequences.

As an example, a woman at one of our shelters who had three children with her husband had fled from him to our shelter in fear for her life. When we tried to house her so that she and her children could get on with their lives, and so that another woman could make use of our services, we discovered that she was not recognized as a safety priority in the housing system.

The crucial criteria for her to qualify for an accelerated entrance into public housing was that she produce documents which make it clear that she lived with her husband within the last 3 months. This woman's husband, as part of his control over her life, had not allowed her name to appear on the lease, or indeed on any simple document or bill. She was refused





housing on this basis. Her life and the lives of her and her children were put at risk because of a bureaucratic effort to cope with an untenable shortage of housing. She stayed with us instead.

Another woman who called for our help was being stalked by her former partner after she had already separated from him. She was not eligible for public housing because she was not currently living with the man who abused her. That he had found her home and threatened her life each and every day was of no import to the housing people, who hear such terrifying stories each day. Let us remind you: Both Gillian Hadley and Arlene May, women whose tragic ends were the subject of coroners' inquests, were hunted down and killed, in their own homes -- after separating from their partners.

Women Need Housing, Not More Coroners' Inquests

We have had numerous inquests and social audits over the last four years that have identified a broad range of social policy solutions that require serious fiscal commitment. Three of these are notable in their repetition and refinement of what we already know: Ontario is not safe for women and children who want to escape violence in their homes. The three sets of recommendations arose from May/Isles, Jane Doe and Gillian Hadley. They are explored below.

The YWCA has participated in various aspects of each of these public reckonings. The recommendations that have resulted from this work, undertaken in earnest by parties from all walks of life, are not the pipe dreams of fringe groups; these are matters of life and death for ordinary women and children who use our programs to help themselves.

If we add up all the recommendations made at inquests and social audits that have been conducted into preventable assaults and deaths of women in the Province of Ontario, it would give you a separate recommendation to work on for nearly each day of the year. Since 1998, 328 recommendations have been made to keep women from dying at the hands of their partners in their homes in our communities.

In 1998, the Coroner's Inquest into the death of Arlene May, of Collingwood, at the hands of her estranged and abusive partner Randy Isles, blasted us with 213 recommendations to prevent similar tragedies. The recommendations were a stinging indictment of the co-ordination of services to assist assaulted women, and particularly focussed on the Criminal Justice System. While some of these recommendations found





their way into practice –such as the opening of the pilot specialized domestic Violence “K” Courts, and the funding of the Transitional Support Workers Program, and the Here To Help Program for child-witnesses – these are woefully inadequate tangibles to point to four years after the fact.

Building on the work of the May/Isles Inquest, the 1999 Review of the Investigation of Sexual Assaults Toronto Police Service (Jeffrey Griffiths, C.A., Toronto Audit Services, October 1999) called for far-reaching and immensely feasible changes to the criminal justice system, including co-operation among investigating units across the province in cases of sexual and domestic assault. (This became known as the “Jane Doe Audit”.)

Just this year, Gillian Hadley had to pay the price for the government’s inaction on these previous recommendations. Mrs Hadley was a sitting duck for her violent and estranged husband, because there was nowhere for her to go. At the inquest into her death it became clear that inadequate social assistance rates, coupled with a low vacancy rate, and the inaction on the recommendation of the May/Isles inquest, killed Gillian Hadley. That coroner’s inquest made 58 recommendations. In its report, the jury charged eight government of Ontario departments and Ministries with redressing inadequate policies and funding levels in order to prevent another case like this from occurring. A key area of focus for the jury was the lack of safe, affordable housing.

Mrs Hadley may have died from a gun to the head, but the whole of Ontario knows that she died because her income was too low to afford market rent, and she had nowhere else to go.

Our membership wants you to put real money into housing

We were pleased to see that the Ontario Government was a signatory to the National Housing Agreement, and has pledged \$244 million to the issue.

We do not believe, despite our pleasure that Ontario has made a commitment, that \$244 million is nearly enough to address the problem at hand.

We are also concerned that the Provincial government will place unwarranted confidence in private sector investment in housing to make up Ontario’s contribution. In addition, we want to make it clear that without government funding, the not-for-profit housing providers are unable to





provide adequate and coordinated affordable housing solutions. It has been clearly demonstrated in this province that the market alone does not rush in to fill gaps in social policy and housing stock investment, and the not-for-profit sector is too strapped for resources to be able to deal adequately with the scale of the crisis.

The YWCA supports the 1% solution to the housing crisis in Canada. The emergency services we provide in YWCAs across the province, such as adequate shelters, food, parent relief, though imperative now, will not serve forever. The 1% solution proposes that all levels of government spend an additional one percent of their existing total budgets on housing. In the case of Ontario, this would mean spending considerably more than the \$244 million pledged at the federal housing meeting last November.

On average, the federal, provincial and municipal governments of Canada spend about one percent of their total budgets on housing; in 1994-95, they spent \$3.83 billion out of a total of \$358 billion. An increase of one percent would hence double the amount now spent and would go far towards ending homelessness in the next three to five years.

Doubling the average spent would not only substantially increase the number of housing units but would also increase the support services for people who need housing, for women and children recovering from abuse. There would be funding for new construction, renovation of existing units and subsidies for people on low incomes. Women like Gillian Hadley, and like the thousands of women in communities across Ontario, would have somewhere safe to call home.

We urge you to consider the investment needed to address this critical situation. We look forward to seeing concrete outcomes that make a real difference in the lives of the women and children of this province. The women and children of Ontario are counting on the outcome of your deliberations.

Sincerely,

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