

March 24, 2003

To the Honourable Ministers:

We are writing to you with regard to the very serious matter of the Canada Gun Registry, and the proposed changes to Bill C-10. Enveloped in suspicions about its alleged mismanagement, the gun control systems of this country nevertheless form a critical barrier between the way of life Canadians expect and the wholesale war zones that engulf the urban centres, schools and rural communities to the south of the border.

The Auditor General attacked management and transparency of the system, not the law itself.

As one of Canada's oldest women's associations, the YWCA of Greater Toronto is most concerned to emphasize that gun control forms what little protection women currently have against the escalating violence against them by partners and former partners. September 2002 Statistics Canada data shows an increase in the number of "domestic" homicides --violent deaths of women at the hands of their husbands—in Ontario, where two Provincial Inquests have demanded closer and more extensive controls and monitoring for the requisition and licensing of arms. In both inquest cases, inadequate monitoring of arms was cited as a key factor in the death of women and their children.

Media attention in recent weeks has focused on the Auditor General's report, and public safety objectives have been all but forgotten. The report identified a number of problems with the system but did not question the fundamental principles of the law. While the Justice Minister Martin Cauchon has stood firm so far, the recent report by his consultant Raymond Hession proposes changes which will not result in significant savings, but will undermine public safety.

We urge you to consider the following:

- The new system is working. License screening has prevented 7,000 potentially dangerous people from owning guns. Police access the gun registration database 2000 times a day to support investigations and improve their own safety on the job.

- The “Billion Dollar Gun Registry” is misleading. The total cost to set up a brand new program, license most owners, and register most guns has averaged \$96 million per year, totalling \$677 million over 7 years. The new system is expected to operate for about \$80 million a year.
- The old system cost \$30 million a year. Six separate inquests revealed flaws and recommended licensing and registration
- The new licensing system cost 60% of the total. Even the Canadian Alliance supports the licensing of all owners. The registration system for guns represents less than 30% of the costs.
- The new firearms’ program is almost complete. 90% of all firearms’ owners are now licensed. 75% of all firearms are now registered.
- Despite the costs, most Canadians and major policing and safety groups have said: "Stay the Course".

You can preserve the best of the current system by addressing the following:

- Address cost issues but not at the risk of public safety. Stronger firearms’ laws over 10 years have contributed to a decrease in deaths and injuries from accidents, violence, and suicides with guns.
- Support Bill C-10 as is, a compromise bill that will make changes to improve efficiency. But do not support more changes that will jeopardize public safety.
- Do not support Internet licensing. Police oppose it because it defeats the purpose of screening for risk, including the signatures of references who confirm the applicant’s suitability to own a gun. We do not issue passports on the internet although it would be cheaper.
- Do not support decriminalization of firearms’ offences. Most firearms’ owners have already complied with the law. Allow the police to exercise discretion in dealing with accidental failure to obtain a licence or register a gun. Otherwise you risk making it seem optional. Tory amendments defeated in 1995 are being floated. They will not save money. The critics will not be satisfied.

Again we urge you to “stay the course” on this crucial issue that affects the safety of all Canadians, and most especially affects the safety of Canada’s women and their children. At a time when international bodies are chastising Canada for an erosion of

women's equality, the demise of the gun registry would surely sound a wrong note.

Yours sincerely

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