

May 21, 2010

Yasir Naqvi MPP, Ottawa Centre
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Revenue
Suite 204, 411 Roosevelt Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario, K2A 3X9

Re: OCTEVAW's Response to Bill 53, the *Escaping Domestic Violence Act, 2010*

Dear Mr. Naqvi,

The Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women and, through leadership, education, advocacy and political action, to promoting a coordinated response to women and their children who have experienced abuse. Our members include women's centres and shelters, counselling agencies, community resource and health centres, victim services, child protection services, hospital and police representatives, the crown, academic researchers and other concerned community members. We have collaborated for more than 20 years to ensure that our broad network of services work together for the best interests of women and children.

OCTEVAW would like to commend your initiative, the introduction of Bill 53, towards making the lives of women and children safer. We echo Karen MacInnis' comments as the Director of Interval House of Ottawa which is a long-standing member agency of our coalition. It takes our entire community to end violence against women. Therefore, it is critical that political leaders take concerted and practical action towards preventing abuse and reducing the systemic barriers for women who unfortunately have to leave their homes.

Below is our feedback on the proposed legislation which is in line with what the violence against women management team in Ottawa has proposed.

Firstly, it must be noted that although the Bill provides an "early termination of a lease, with a reduced period of notice to a landlord of 28 days or more," that time frame still poses a substantial threat to women living in immediate danger who must leave right away, as your backgrounder acknowledges. Lowering the period of notice to a few business days would facilitate the safety of women who may be waiting for the very rear opportunity to leave.

Secondly, many women in abusive relationships or who have experienced a sexual assault from a partner do not access the criminal justice system. Their reluctance is based in fear of the perpetrator's retaliation, fear of institutional and police involvement and societal stigma and shame. This in turn may make the receipt of a Peace Bond, Restraining Order, or letter from a police force impossible to obtain for many women. This is especially true of immigrant women,

young women, criminalized women, Aboriginal women and women relying on their abuser for care. In addition, many women experience emotional abuse and intimidation which are not covered by the Criminal Code yet are extremely damaging to them and their children who experience it.

Woman abuse counselors and women's advocates in community health centres, counselling centres and other provincially recognized agencies often work with women who are trying to escape abuse but who have not involved the police or criminal justice system. Therefore, including a letter advocating on their behalf (similar to that required to obtain priority status on provincially subsidized housing wait lists) would verify a woman's experience of abuse and act as a substantiating document. This would drastically reduce barriers and help to facilitate the realistic application of the Bill.

We thank you for the opportunity to introduce our coalition and to provide constructive comments regarding Bill 53. If further community consultation is to take place, OCTEVAW would welcome being contacted to work alongside you. Please feel free to visit our website at www.octevaw-cocvff.ca to access more information on our mission and our programs.

We will be following your proposed legislation and will continue to encourage our political leaders to take violence against women seriously. Please feel free to contact the office at any time.

Sincerely,

Erin Williams
Executive Director
OCTEVAW

Enclosures:

1. OCTEVAW Backgrounder
2. OCTEVAW Membership List 2009-2010