

September 3, 2009

David J. McGuinty, B.A., LL.B, LL.M.
2141 Thurston Dr., Suite 205
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1G 6C9

RE: OCTEVAW'S PLEA TO MPS AND SENATORS TO RESIST THE RELAXATION OF CANADA'S GUN LAWS

Dear Mr. McGuinty,

As the MP for Ottawa South, we are writing to urge you to work to meet international obligations to protect women and children from gun violence by resisting efforts to relax Canada's gun laws.

Currently, there is one bill before Parliament and another before the Senate that would eliminate the registration of unrestricted long-guns:

1. **Bill C-391:** Manitoba Conservative MP Candice Hoepfner's Bill C-391 calls for the dissolution of the long-gun (rifles and shotguns) registry. It also aims to retroactively destroy all records of registered long-guns to date.
2. **Bill S-5:** The Conservative government's bill introduced into the Senate would abolish the long-gun (rifles and shotguns) registry.

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.

How do these Bills affect violence against women?

Rifles and shotguns are the firearm most likely to be used in woman abuse. The efforts to destroy the long-gun registry pose a very serious risk to the women experiencing intimate partner violence. Thus, the passage of either C-391 or S-5 would seriously weaken Canada's gun control laws and endanger public safety, especially that of women and children.

The risk of physical harm, threats, and intimidation to women increases when a gun is present in the home where abuse is occurring. Moreover, the use of guns often results in multiple victims, many times children. Violence against women is a systemic problem that is engrained in many aspects of our society. UNIFEM and Amnesty International have described this world-wide human rights violation as “pervasive,” “universal” and “pandemic.” OCTEVAW strongly believes that the access to and use of firearms contributes to this global problem.

- In Canada the rate of spousal homicide against woman has been between 3 and 5 times higher than the rate against men from 1977 to 2006.
- 1 in 3 Canadian women killed by their husbands is shot, 88% with legally owned rifles and shotguns, the firearms of choice in domestic violence and suicide.
- 78% of men who shot and killed their female intimate partners said that they would not have used another weapon.
- The two largest predictors of intimate partner female homicide are: prior threats to kills and access to firearms.
- Men who killed their female intimate partners by knife or strangulation admitted they would have used a gun if they had had access.

The Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee reviewed 62 cases involving 100 deaths where 94% of the victims were women and 92% of the perpetrators were men from 2003-2007. During that time period, the committee made five different recommendations concerning the access and control of firearms. In their *Fifth Annual Report of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee* released in 2007, the committee reviewed a file where a woman was murdered by her common-law husband with a crossbow. “The perpetrator had a criminal record dating back 20 years, but as a hunter he had six firearms registered to him, as well as a crossbow.” The following recommendation to the Federal Government and the Department of Justice regarding firearms regulation was made:

Recommendation 22

It is recommended that the Federal Government revisit the Firearms Act to study the feasibility of a legislative amendment to require the registration of crossbows as restricted weapons.

Comment: There is considerable attention to the seizure of firearms as a preventative measure regarding domestic violence occurrences. Provincial Guidelines are moot to the seizure of other weapons. Although this provides some difficulty in how to characterize numerous items in a residence that could be used as weapons, at a minimum, police officers should be provided with the power to seize any item designed to be used as a weapon even though it doesn't meet the restricted or prohibited category.

Why are Canada's current gun laws important to maintain?

Statistics collected in the first six months after the Public Agents Firearms Regulations came into effect on October 28, 2008 show that, of the 8,281 guns seized from owners who posed a danger to public safety, 74% were non-restricted weapons, mostly shotguns and rifles. In addition, 43% of firearms seized by the police were registered in the Firearms Registry. The police use this registry 15,000 times a day to aid in their investigations. Therefore, it is important that Canada maintains a comprehensive gun registry.

Secondly, between 1997 and 2006, the rate of firearm-related spousal homicide decreased by nearly 50% in part due to legal changes made in 1995 that focused on strengthening controls on shotguns and rifles. Our current laws have helped to save the lives of many women and children across the country and needs to be maintained and strengthened not softened.

Lastly, in 2006, the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey singled out Canada's gun law for its significant impact on reducing gun death and injury in Canada. Currently Canada ranks No. 8 on access to handguns while the US ranks No. 1. Not only would the passage of C-391 or S-5 threaten the protection of women and children, but Canada's international commitments to the norms on the control of small arms and the elimination of violence against women would be undermined. Through the Firearms Act, Canada is complying with these norms and serving as an example to other countries.

The gun registry has made all Canadians safer, especially women and children. As the MP for Ottawa South, we urge you to work to meet international obligations to protect women and children from gun violence by resisting efforts to relax Canada's gun laws. OCTEVAW puts the safety of women and children first and you should too.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing your response on how you intend to uphold Canada's current gun laws.

Yours sincerely,

Advocacy and Public Engagement Committee
OCTEVAW

For more information, please contact:

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Enclosures:

1. Disarming Domestic Violence Fact Sheet
2. *Hidden from Sight: A look at the Prevalence of Violence Against Women in Ottawa - May 2009*

Suggested Resources:

1. Coalition for Gun Control www.guncontrol.ca
2. Disarming Domestic Violence, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)
3. Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, Statistics Canada, 2008
4. Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee - Annual Report to the Chief Coroner (2008) <http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/files/DVDRC08.pdf>
5. "Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners," David Adams, Vanderbilt University Press, 2007