

Chief Vern White
Ottawa Police Service
474 Elgin St.
Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 2J6

January 24, 2010

Re: OCTEVAW's response to recent reports of Ottawa Police Service's assault of women

Dear Chief White,

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.

As you know, OCTEVAW has worked alongside the criminal justice system community for over 25 years. Our Justice Committee has made productive progress by bringing together Ottawa Police Service, the Crown's office, victim services and women's agencies. Representatives of the Partner Assault Unit, the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Unit and the Victim Crisis Unit have been and continue to be actively involved in providing valuable insight and solution-focused partnerships to end violence against women (VAW).

For instance, together we have improved the breakdown of statistical reporting so that we can better discern VAW trends and outcomes. We should all be proud of this collaboration and the other steps we have taken to create better working relations which have produced effective and measureable results for women and children in our community.

Despite the gains mentioned above, trust in police services among women who experience violence is still very fragile and the recent release of the Stacy Bonds video on November 25, 2010 was disheartening for many. This includes our community, our coalition members and many of the women our member agencies serve. In a December 8, 2010 Metro article, the Acting Chief Gilles Larochelle referred to the officers' actions in the video as "questionable." The actions we saw on tape were not "questionable." They were indefensible and a violation of Ms. Bonds civil and human rights. There seems to be an organizational culture that tolerates these abuses despite the fact that there are many fine officers, many of whom we work with, who show respect to people and have integrity. Ironically, November 25 not only marked the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women, but it also marked a day in which many women in our city asked themselves, "Could that have been me; would I be safe in the hands of the Ottawa Police?"

We know that women do not report sexual violence or woman abuse in significant numbers. When we discuss how to hold abusers accountable and keep women safe, the response from law

enforcement is predominately the encouragement of reporting. As women's advocates, we know many women do not feel safe to report, do not believe that they will be taken seriously and do not feel as though the criminal justice system will protect them. The brutal mistreatment of Ms. Bonds has unfortunately reinforced those sentiments among many women we have spoken to. There has been a significant loss of confidence felt by many in the women's community and racialized communities. The recently released POWER (Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work, Educate and Resist) report entitled *Challenges* on the treatment of sex trade workers in Ottawa also reinforces these feelings.

What can and will be done about this?

We believe opening up police operations including the cell block and the release of more detailed data to public scrutiny and oversight is crucial in restoring public trust. For example, in a December 13, 2010 CBC interview on strip searches, it was revealed that statistics on strip searches are not kept by the OPS. Many in the community would like accountability with police records and statistics on strip searches. We also support the establishment of an independent municipal civilian complaints review commission. We believe the creation of this commission will increase public trust in the complaint process and will lead to more community and police cooperation.

You may be aware of the release of OCTEVAW's *Hidden from Sight* report (May 2009). This report highlighted the prevalence of violence against women in our city. OCTEVAW is planning to release a second edition in the spring 2011. We anticipate that OPS will be forthcoming in providing us with statistics from relevant police units. More information about the report can be found on the OCTEVAW website: www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/en/hidden_from_sight.

We are also committed to engaging in open and solution-focused dialogue around screening and training of police officers. It troubles us that some police officers were willing to stand by and not intervene when the assault of Ms. Bonds was taking place.

OCTEVAW is committed to working with the Ottawa Police to create a safer city for all of our residents. In a spirit of cooperation and bridge-building we would like to come up with solutions together about how OPS could regain some of the valuable trust that was lost from the Ottawa community.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Erin Williams
on behalf of the Advocacy Committee of OCTEVAW

CC COMPAC Police Co-Chair, Charles Bordeleau
Police Services Board Member, Carl Nicholson
Diversity and Race Relations Chair, John Medeiros
Critical Incidence and Critical Situations
Liaison Committee
Mayor of Ottawa, Jim Watson