

February 19, 2009

Mr. Christopher Bentley, MPP  
Ministry of the Attorney General  
McMurtry-Scott Building  
720 Bay Street, 11th Floor  
Toronto, ON, M5G 2K1

Re: Offer to reciprocate information on woman abuse to local Justice of the Peace office

To Mr. Bentley,

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 abuse and rape crisis agencies, victim services, child protection services, hospital and police representatives, the crown, academic researchers and other concerned community members.

OCTEVAW has three Standing Committees that focus on specific issues related to violence against women. Our Justice Committee is made up of various criminal justice partners and 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 their children. For example, in 2006, our Justice Committee along with our previous Women's Support Group Facilitators Committee collaborated together on the issue of abused women being charged with assault and its subsequent safety implications and impacts on children. A two-day meeting entitled "A Community Consultation: When Abused Women are Charged," facilitated by a police officer and women's advocate from Duluth, Minnesota, was held to develop strategies to address this issue. It led to the use of a training video for Ottawa police officers and the assessment of a "primary/dominant aggressor" when responding to domestic violence calls.

Our Justice Committee often identifies areas where we can gain more information on the different aspects of our justice system. As a result, the Justice of the Peace (JP) was brought forward as a point of interest. OCTEVAW members were appreciative that on November 4, 2008, His Worship Justice of the Peace Brian Mackey gave an informative presentation to the Committee. He provided our members with a review of the role and responsibilities of the office of the JP, including, becoming a JP, training and impartiality. He also provided us with information on bail hearings and peace bonds within the context of woman abuse. It was particularly important to understand how JP's are expected to work within the requirements of the Criminal Code and the Ontario *Provincial Offences Act*.

We understood from his presentation that it is the Crown's responsibility to educate JPs regarding woman abuse at hearings. We have also gathered from the Ontario Court's website that community awareness is one of four main qualifications and selection criteria for a JP:

#### Community Awareness

- A commitment to public service
- Awareness of and an interest in knowing more about the social problems that give rise to cases coming before the courts
- Sensitivity to changes in social values relating to cases coming before the courts
- Interest in methods of dispute resolution alternatives to formal adjudication and interest in community resources available for participating in the disposition of cases

(Source: <http://www.ontariocourts.on.ca/jpaac/en/qualification.htm>)

We would like to reciprocate by providing your local office information on woman abuse and information on our diverse resources. This may also be an opportunity to provide a sense of how our violence against women community collaborates together to coordinate service. The provincial government does provide training courses for JPs and we would be pleased with the chance to complement that training.

Such an exchange can only add to our mutual understanding of what can be expected of the institutional response to woman abuse, consistent with your commitment and current policies which are appreciated by our community.

We look forward to your reply in the near future.

Sincerely,

Erin Williams  
Executive Director – OCTEVAW

Joan Gullen  
Community Member – OCTEVAW  
On behalf of the Justice Committee of OCTEVAW

CC  
Angelika Lorinser  
Chair – Justice Committee of OCTEVAW

Her Worship Justice of the Peace Claudette L. Holmes  
Regional Senior Justice of the Peace for the East Region  
161 Elgin St. Ottawa, ON, K2P 2K1