

Office of the
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to the Premier

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Queen's Park

Toronto (Ontario) M7A1A1



Ontario

April 28, 2004

Ms. Heather McGregor
YWCA of Greater Toronto
80 Woodlawn Avenue East
Bongard House
Toronto, ON
M4T1C1

Dear Ms. McGregor:

I am writing to thank you for participating in our government's recent consultations to develop a comprehensive domestic violence action plan for Ontario.

As you are aware, our government has committed to do more to protect women and children from domestic violence. Shortly after forming government, in November 2003 Premier McGuinty asked me to conduct broad-based consultations to determine how our government might better protect women and children from violence. Our goal: to re-start a constructive dialogue long absent at Queen's Park.

I was very pleased to take the responsibility requested by the Premier. The issues surrounding violence against women and children are extremely important to the Premier, and to our government as a whole. The issues are also important to me personally, as I have been dedicated to working with others like yourself for many years to build the necessary support structures for women and children affected by violence in the home, and to facilitate programs that address the issue of prevention.

To ensure that our government exploited the considerable expertise and fully examined the diverse needs across our province, extensive stakeholder and expert consultations were undertaken over a two-month period. During January and February 2004, I conducted 30 round table meetings with more than 180 front-line workers, academics, advocates, experts and survivors. Your ideas, comments and concerns have grounded and shaped the actions our government is committed to take immediately as well as in the years to come. I cannot overstate the value of these contributions.

Let me start by saying thank you. Thank you for your dedication and hard work. Thank you for sharing your stories with us. Thank you for bringing forward innovative strategies and solutions. Thank you for your commitment to work with our government. Thank you for challenging us and for inspiring us.

The response from groups ready and willing to work with our government was exciting, heartening and at times overwhelming. Many dedicated Ontarians have worked for so long and have so much expertise to offer. Unfortunately, without a government that recognizes the pain, suffering and loss that goes hand in hand with domestic violence, individuals and non-governmental organizations can only do so much.

At this time I would like to ask for your continued support and involvement in this important matter, and I would like to provide you with a brief overview of the information compiled during the consultations as well as an overview of the first steps our government has taken to address the issue of violence against women.

The consultations established that the comprehensive strategy to better protect women and children and ultimately break the cycle of violence must include four key components:

1. **Primary prevention** - ensuring that the community defines violence as unacceptable and works towards preventing people from seeking violent solutions to problems and conflicts;
2. **Prevention with high risk groups** - educating and seeking early intervention for those who are more vulnerable and at high risk;
3. **Crisis intervention** - providing immediate safety, support with emphasis on moving towards strong, self-reliant solutions and a swift response to end violence; and
4. **Prevention of re-victimization** - holding the perpetrator accountable, and ensure constructive consequences, keeping the long-term safety of the women and children foremost and provide all those involved with choices that will help them live free from violence.

The consultations clearly confirmed that the most critical issues for our government to address to protect women and their children from violence are ***poverty, women's lack of economic independence, and the lack of community supports and housing options.***

The consultations also stressed the need for our government to focus on:

- Prevention and early intervention to break the cycle of violence;
- The development of better training and employment opportunities for women;
- A more targeted and responsive approach to our diverse population;
- Encouraging more sharing of best practices;
- Modifications to policies, practices, regulations and legislation;
- Encouraging broad-based engagement across many sectors;
- Striking a balanced approach between prevention and protection.

On April 6th of this year Premier McGuinty announced the first five steps towards addressing the issue of domestic violence in our Province. These steps are based on the findings of the consultations.

First, our government has committed \$3.5 million to second stage housing. This is a very important first step. The \$3.5 million will be allocated each year to provide supports

to women and children in second-stage housing. Throughout my consultations this is what I heard people needed most: a re-investment in second stage housing. In addition to the new funds, the government will initiate stakeholder consultations on how to improve second-stage housing supports in the context of the government's affordable housing strategy in the spring of 2004.

Second, on the Premier announced that a symposium on domestic violence shall occur annually, in order to facilitate an opportunity for the sharing of best practices. A symposium will bring together community leaders, experts and service providers to learn from each other, to build networks of help, and to rally around the cause in a common bond.

I noticed as I travelled the province, that too often a group or organization that was doing outstanding work in Kitchener did not have the chance to share that work with a group in Bancroft. That a group in Toronto was unaware of the innovative work being undertaken in Ottawa. This lack of connection is what the annual symposium will remedy. And, in doing so, it will become instrumental in the ongoing strategy to combat domestic violence.

Third, our government is committed to the conducting the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment Tool pilot project (ODARA).

Women suffer on average 35 incidents of violence before the first call to police. These incidents are often at the hands of the same offender. More often than not, offenders re-offend, sometimes leading to even more severe incidents of violence, sometimes even death. I have heard that we need to better assess the risk that an individual will re-offend. The experts have told us, the May/lie and Hadley inquest jury has recommended it to us, and we are listening.

ODARA will train police officers, Crown attorneys and others working in the criminal justice system to better assess risk in abusive situations. They will learn to quickly identify "predictors" for domestic violence to re-occur. This will reduce the chances abusers will be allowed back to abuse again.

Fourth, the government will help mobilize communities by investing \$4.9 million over four years to address domestic violence through an education and awareness campaign in Ontario. Boys who witness their fathers abuse their mothers are 1,000 times more likely to abuse their partners. And, girls who witness their mothers being abused are much more likely to end up in abusive relationships. We must recognize that these learning patterns start at a very young age.

Only by addressing the root of the problems can we ever begin to make long-lasting progress in the direction of significantly reducing domestic violence. The best way to get to the root of the problem is to instil values, understanding and awareness among our communities and, among our communities' children.

Fifth, the government has created a Ministerial Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, comprised of key Ministers and myself to implement further reforms and work together to ensure that they are both timely and effective. Ministries will work together to implement immediate measures and continue with the development and implementation of an

integrated, strategic and comprehensive action plan to reduce and ultimately prevent violence against women.

The committee will elevate domestic violence as a priority and provide leadership in developing a coordinated approach that fully considers input from a broad range of groups.

These first five steps are significant in the context of a greater understanding emerging from our government today. Our government is changing the way government listens and responds to the needs of women suffering abuse. We are demonstrating a fundamental philosophical change in the way government views and responds to the issue of violence against women.

We are committed to working in partnership with all stakeholders, within government and the larger community, to develop a long-term strategy incorporating applied research and ongoing evaluation. We must focus on program development and delivery to address some of the areas where there are no clear answers about what is most effective.

We invite the continued participation of all Ontarians as government ministries work together to implement immediate measures and continue with the development of an integrated, strategic and comprehensive action plan.

Preventing violence against women is everyone's responsibility - we are calling on all Ontarians to join us in defeating this epidemic.

I look forward to working in partnership with all of you as our government continues with the implementation of a comprehensive long-term plan to reduce and hopefully one day end the terrible epidemic of violence women face in our province.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurel Broten".

Laurel Broten, M.P.P. Etobicoke-Lakeshore
Parliamentary Assistant to
the Premier

:cah