



A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN



Deputation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy on Bill 132 Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act YWCA Toronto – January 22, 2016

Good Afternoon,

My name is Maureen Adams and I am here today on behalf of YWCA Toronto. Our Association serves over 11,000 women and girls in 30 programs in 12 communities across the City of Toronto. Almost 1,400 women are in programs that focus on violence against women.

YWCA Toronto has a long history of partnership with the Province of Ontario in working towards full equality for women and girls. For example, we receive funding for supportive housing, mental health services, employment and training, and violence against women initiatives. We are keen to work with government and women's groups to implement urgently needed changes that will prevent and reduce sexual assault and support survivors to rebuild their lives.

It was around this time - almost a year ago- that we hosted Premier Wynne and Minister MacCharles at our Elm Street location for the launch of the province's *It's Never Okay Action Plan* to stop sexual violence and harassment. We also participated in hearings held by the *Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment* where we made recommendations about how the province could help strengthen supports for survivors. And we recently participated in consultations on proposed changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act* to make it easier for women experiencing violence to flee abuse.

Ending sexual violence and harassment is a priority for YWCA Toronto. The women we work with tell us that there needs to be a continuum of strategies to ensure they can find safety, support and justice. These strategies range from changing awareness and behavior, to crisis and trauma counselling, from training and education, to legislative change and reform.

Mostly importantly women tell us they fear for their safety as they navigate the legal system and try to rebuild their lives after violence.

YWCA Toronto congratulates the government on the comprehensive strategies in *It's Never Okay Action Plan* and the speed with which it is being implemented. The public awareness campaign is hard hitting and exceptionally realistic. And the leadership across government and across party lines is critically important.

We strongly support Bill 132:

1. Because colleges and universities will now be required to develop policies to reduce sexual assault on campus and to investigate all complaints fairly and expeditiously. And the new reporting and review requirements will be mandatory and will include oversight by students to ensure that real change occurs on campus.
2. Because employers must develop sexual harassment prevention programs in the work place to protect women. Employers also now have a duty to ensure that all sexual violence and harassment incidents and complaints are thoroughly investigated.
3. Because the limitation period for all civil proceedings in sexual assault cases will be removed enabling survivors to bring forward historic sexual abuse claims.
4. Because the limitation period to make a compensation claim to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board will be eliminated. This will

allow women who may not have known about the tribunal or have been able to make a claim to exercise their rights to compensation.

5. Because tenancy agreements for women who experience violence will be shortened making it easier for survivors to flee abuse without financial penalty.

Bill 132 addresses many of the issues identified by our participants but there is still much work to be done. Looking ahead, we know that there are many excellent recommendations from the all-party Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment that should be considered and implemented.

YWCA Toronto also specifically recommends:

1. Increasing funding for affordable, long- term trauma counselling that recognizes the time it takes to heal and recover from sexual assault. Current time- limited counselling programs are inconsistent with best practices in trauma recovery.
2. Improving access to legal counsel in sexual assault cases that proceed to trial to ensure that women's Charter rights are upheld and hard fought-for rape shield principles are maintained throughout the cross-examination process.
3. Tackling the misogyny that underlies sexual assault by funding empowerment programs for girls who are disproportionately affected by violence. This would include a focus on consent and healthy relationships.
4. Taking immediate action on the sex trafficking of girls, one of the most extreme forms of violence against women.

On behalf of the women and girls at YWCA Toronto, we urge this Committee and members of the legislature to support Bill 132 and the related recommendations. Women across the province are counting on your support.

Thank you

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