

May 15, 2018

Jean-Marie David, Clerk of the Committee  
Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security  
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street  
House of Commons  
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Dear Jean-Marie David,

**RE: Bill C-71 – An Act to amend certain Acts and Regulations in relation to firearms**

We are writing to ensure you have the proper evidence base to evaluate Bill C-71. Crucial to your consideration of C-71's efficacy in protecting citizens from gun violence are the voices of women's equality advocates and those with expertise in the dynamics and effects of gender-based violence. We have long been supporters and advocates for the rights of women and girls in Canada, and we ask you to consider the impact that this legislation will have on the lives of women and girls across the country. Our three organizations, the Barbra Schlifer Clinic, LEAF and the National Association of Women in the Law (NAWL) all have well-established reputations in law reform, access to justice and the protection of equality rights in Canada. The Barbra Schlifer Clinic assists over 5,000 women a year and is Canada's only gender-based violence legal, counselling and language interpretation clinic. LEAF is a national, non-profit organization working to advance the equal rights of women and girls in Canada as guaranteed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. NAWL is a feminist organization that promotes the equality rights of women in Canada through legal education, research, and law reform advocacy.

Unlike the legal context of the United States, the Supreme Court of Canada has made clear that there is no right to own guns in Canada. Instead, all Canadians have a right to be safe from guns, and the Government is obligated to protect its citizens. Within recent debates on gun reform, the experiences of women in Canada have been largely overlooked. In discussions surrounding Bill C-71, we ask that the Government not forget its obligation to protect women from the violence that is inflicted upon them by guns and the owners of those guns. **In determining risk for domestic violence in the home, guns remain the single most determinant factor for lethality;** this is both a well-researched fact and a practical consideration in how we seek to protect women on a daily basis. So far, in 2018 there have been over 57 women killed in Canada. That means at least one woman every other day. As the Statistics Canada's 2016 report concludes, firearm-related homicides have increased in number

and rate in Canada for the third year in a row. In 2016, there were 223 firearm-related homicides, 44 more than the previous year. This represents a rate of 0.61 per 100,000 population, a 23% increase from the rate in 2015 and the highest rate since 2005.

In the context of a stated commitment to gender-based violence, we expect that this government will, as promised, turn its attention towards this devastating fact and commit to protecting the lives of Canadian women and all others affected by gun violence.

In your assessment of Bill C-71, we ask you to consider the following proposed amendments, which aim to better protect the public from gun violence.

- 1) **Create a coherent public safety strategy:** the framing of this legislation is not consistent with a coherent public safety strategy, which would directly address violence against women, suicide, and political violence.
- 2) **Amend the language regarding licensing:** in addition to the already proposed changes to section 5(2) of the *Act*, we suggest the addition of subsection (d) which will state “or for any other reason is considered a threat to themselves or others”. This simple change will allow for broader issues to be considered, including spouse’s concerns.
- 3) **Restore controls on sales of rifles and shotguns:** these controls were in place in 1977, and they required the licensed firearms dealer to record the Firearms Acquisition Certificate (now License) number, make, model and serial number of firearms. This allowed police to inspect without a warrant in order to trace firearms (unless it was for a criminal investigation). These records should be subject to inspection annually.
- 4) **Ensure controls on handguns are reinstated:** this can be done through restoring strict issuance of the authorizations to transport. Previous legislation allowed restricted and prohibited weapons to be transported between two or more locations, but the new formula allows them to be transported to any gun club or range in the province in which a gun owner resides. This means virtually anywhere. There is nothing in the law to stem the proliferation of restricted and prohibited weapons and the risk of diversion.
- 5) **Ensure that owners of multiple firearms are subject to higher levels of scrutiny:** given this risk of diversion, it is important to ensure that owners of multiple firearms – whether citizens or dealers – are subject to higher levels of scrutiny.
- 6) **Commit to restoring transparent information about the risks of firearms:** mandatory reporting of firearms needs to be instituted across the country, and the government needs to commit to restoring transparent data collection and analysis, evidence-based policies, and public education about the real risks of firearms.
- 7) **Invest in youth and primary prevention services:** this is critically important, as are services for victims of gun violence and their families. With large investments being made, some of these funds should be targeted to these defined issues.
- 8) **Meaningful engagement and consultation with diverse women groups:** it is also critically important to consult with groups who work with or advocate for diverse women using an intersectional framework that accounts for the experiences of women who are racialized, indigenous and/or marginalized women because of status, disability

or poverty. Their experiences should be taken into account, and any resources or funding should be allocated keeping their experiences in the forefront of decision making.

We applaud the government for including stronger provisions in this Bill, such as those that require the verification of licenses and the extension of the licensing screening period to ten years. We believe that the language and approaches surrounding firearms should be centred upon public safety and it should take account of experiences of women in Canada. With the addition of the above-proposed amendments, we believe that this legislation will better address the public safety concerns that Canadians have and better protect women in our country from gun violence.

Gun control saves lives, and we are calling on Members of Parliament to stand up for public safety.

If you require any further information about this submission, please contact the undersigned.

Yours truly,

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