

**Written Submission for Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the  
Upcoming Federal Budget**

Submitted to the Standing Committee on Finance by the Women's Legal  
Education and Action Fund (LEAF)



**LEAF**  
**FAEJ**

WOMEN'S LEGAL  
EDUCATION & ACTION FUND  
FONDS D'ACTION ET D'ÉDUCATION  
JURIDIQUE POUR LES FEMMES

Thursday, May 21, 2026

## **Recommendations**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government commit to investing in key infrastructure to address the gender-based violence (GBV) epidemic, by:
  - (a) Fully funding the continuation of the National Action Plan to end GBV (NAP) for the full 10 years with a commitment of \$200 million annually for the next five years, as of 2027-28.
  - (b) Funding the renewal of a comprehensive Federal GBV Strategy to address GBV at the national level with ongoing funding of \$44 million annually.
  - (c) Creating an independent federal GBV Commissioner to monitor the implementation of the NAP and future efforts, with an annual budget of \$3 million.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government amend the *Employment Insurance Act* to ensure workers with family care responsibilities can have better access to income support following job separation.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government commit to providing operational funding of \$10 million per year for five years, starting in 2027-28, to support leading national women’s rights organizations – whose primary mandates are to advance systemic change for women in all their diversity in Canada – to protect women’s rights, address the epidemic of gender-based violence, and increase women’s economic security and prosperity.

Building a stronger, more resilient economy cannot be done without investments in national infrastructure rooted in equality, a cornerstone of Canadian identity. LEAF's budget submission makes three recommendations, with promising returns on investment, that contribute to the government's goal of a resilient economy that is uniquely Canadian.

**Recommendation 1: That the government invest in infrastructure to end gender-based violence.**

A government focused on strengthening the economy, spending less on government operations, and helping Canadians get ahead cannot ignore the financial costs of Canada's gender-based violence (GBV) epidemic. Those costs are borne by individuals, families, and communities – but also by our healthcare, social services, and justice systems. For example, every year, sexual violence alone costs survivors \$14.8 billion, with government tax revenues falling by \$55.5 million.<sup>1</sup>

In this era of nation-building, Canada must also invest in existing social infrastructure, such as the NAP and the Federal GBV Strategy – not dismantle it and risk reversing progress. The federal government is rightly following through on prior investments committed to ending GBV through the NAP, providing \$539.3 million to provinces and territories via bilateral agreements.<sup>2</sup> However, survivors' access to services remains uneven across the country, especially in rural, remote, and Northern communities. Until every survivor has access to services, and until rates of GBV are declining, we need a coordinated, well-resourced national response that centres those most vulnerable to GBV, including disabled women, Indigenous women, racialized women, trans and non-binary people, and women who are homeless or underhoused.

Preventing violence and addressing service gaps requires coordinated action across federal departments, provinces, territories, and community organizations. The federal government must work with advocates whose expertise is grounded in survivors' lived experiences to ensure solutions are evidence-informed.

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<sup>1</sup> Ending Sexual Violence Association of Canada & Ripple Strategy. "New report finds sexual violence costs victims \$14.8 billion annually in Canada", (6 May 2026), online: *Ending Sexual Violence Association of Canada* <<https://endingviolencecanada.org/news/new-report-finds-sexual-violence-costs-victims-14-8-billion-annually-in-canada>>.

<sup>2</sup> "Bilateral agreements to end gender-based violence", (30 March 2026), online: *Canada.ca* <<https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/bilateral-agreements.html>>.

To do this more effectively, the Mass Casualty Commission called for the establishment of a GBV Commissioner<sup>3</sup> with an ombudsperson-like mandate. This office would oversee the NAP and the Federal GBV Strategy, strengthen transparency and accountability, and help ensure Canada meets its international obligations. It would also support greater consistency across jurisdictions and help ensure NAP funds are used efficiently. Establishing this role would bring Canada in line with jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland.

GBV has a staggering financial cost – amounting to billions per year – not to mention its innumerable emotional, physical, and social costs. As the federal government aims to spend less so that Canada can invest more, we are adamant that an investment in infrastructure to end GBV is an essential investment in Canada and in Canadians. It is not only crucial to improving efficiency and results from existing government investments, but is also a necessary step towards reducing the costs of GBV and moving towards a safer, stronger Canada.

**Recommendation 2: That the government amend the *Employment Insurance Act* to ensure workers with family care responsibilities can have better access to income support following job separation.**

Workers with family care responsibilities – who are overwhelmingly women – face barriers to accessing employment insurance (EI) due to longstanding gaps in the *Employment Insurance Act*. Workers are the backbone of the Canadian economy, yet these workers, who on top of their contributions to the Canadian economy provide invaluable care work for their families and communities, are often left without income support after job separation. This issue is especially urgent at a time when Canadians continue to navigate a struggling labour market weakened by U.S. tariffs, including a loss of 111,000 full-time jobs in the first four months of 2026.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, taking on family care responsibilities can impede a person’s access to EI in three ways:

- A person may have to work part-time instead of full-time, making it more difficult to reach the number of hours needed to qualify for EI

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed overview of the features of a federal GBV Commissioner, see Amanda Dale, “What It Takes: Establishing a Gender-Based Violence Accountability Mechanism in Canada”, *Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund*, <<https://www.leaf.ca/publication/what-it-takes-establishing-a-gender-based-violence-accountability-mechanism-in-canada/>>

<sup>4</sup> “Canada’s economy lost nearly 18,000 jobs in April, unemployment hits six-month high”, (8 May 2026), online: *BNN Bloomberg* <<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/business/economics/2026/05/08/canadas-unemployment-rate-rises-to-six-month-high-as-full-time-jobs-drop/>>.

- A person may have to leave a job to take on family care responsibilities, which disqualifies them from receiving EI
- If a person receiving parental and maternity benefits loses their job right before, during, or soon after parental leave, they are denied EI regular benefits

Women are disproportionately impacted as the primary bearers of household and family care responsibilities,<sup>5</sup> which only grow when affordable child-care is inaccessible. Indeed, women are twice as likely than men to be working part-time<sup>6</sup> and are five times more likely to cite child care, personal, or family responsibilities as their primary reason for doing so.<sup>7</sup> They also accounted for 74% of workers who left their jobs for personal or family reasons last year.<sup>8</sup>

The value of unpaid care work, not just for Canadian families but for Canada as a whole, cannot be overstated. In 2019, the economic value of unpaid household work in Canada was between \$516.9 billion and \$860.2 billion – which amounts to 25.2% - 37.2% of the country's GDP that same year.<sup>9</sup>

**Building off the advocacy by MAC Montreal on this issue,<sup>10</sup> we urge the federal government to amend the *Employment Insurance Act* as follows to ensure family caregivers – who are disproportionately women – have the economic support they need following job separation:**

1. Adopt the Interprovincial EI Working Group's [2025 EI Roadmap](#). The roadmap's recommendations are critical to ensuring that EI supports are accessible and adequate.

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<sup>5</sup> Melissa Moyser & Amanda Burlock, "Time use: Total work burden, unpaid work, and leisure" (30 July 2018), online: *Statistics Canada* <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/54931-eng.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, "Proportion of workers in full-time and part-time jobs by gender, annual" (9 January 2026), online: *Statistics Canada*: <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410032703>>.

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, "Part-time employment by reason, annual (x 1,000)" (9 January 2026), online: *Statistics Canada*: <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410002901&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=3.3&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2025&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20250101>>.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada, "Reason for leaving job during previous year, annual (x 1,000)" (9 January 2026), online: *Statistics Canada*: <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410012601&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.2&pickMembers%5B3%5D=5.3&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2025&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20250101>>.

<sup>9</sup> Sandy Besporstov & Amanda Sinclair, "Estimating the economic value of unpaid household work in Canada, 2015 to 2019" (17 March 2022), online: *Statistics Canada* <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-605-x/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm>>.

<sup>10</sup> See "Mouvement Action-Chômage", <<https://macmtl.qc.ca/femmes/>>.

2. Address gender-based discrimination in EI by:
  - a. Creating a hybrid eligibility requirement for EI regular benefits with two ways to qualify: hours worked or weeks worked.<sup>11</sup> Having weeks worked count would make it easier for part-time workers to qualify for EI.
  - b. Allowing parents to access EI regular benefits if they lose their jobs right before, during, or soon after parental leave. Specifically:
    - i. Repeal Subsection 12(6) of the *Act* to remove the 50 week cap on combining EI regular benefits and special benefits for maternity or parental leave.
    - ii. Amend Subsection 10(10) of the *Act* to add maternity and parental leave benefits as a reason to extend the benefit period to 104 weeks.
  - c. Eliminating the total disqualification for voluntary resignation at subsection 30(1) of the *Act*.

Making these amendments to the *Employment Insurance Act* is critical to supporting a resilient economy and recognizing the invaluable contributions of workers who also provide the household and caregiving labour foundational to building strong communities across Canada.

### **Recommendation 3: Invest in National Women’s Rights Organizations (NRWOs).**

NWROs support systemic change to achieve substantive equality for all women in Canada through research, legal expertise, policy analysis, and advocacy. Investing in NWROs means investing in equality – a core Canadian value. It’s also a smart economic investment: advancing gender equality could contribute up to \$150 billion to Canada’s GDP.<sup>12</sup> However, NWROs lack the stable funding they need to sustain their critical work.

NWROs have faced increasing financial precarity over the last couple of decades, starting with federal cuts to their operational funding in 1998. This funding has never been reinstated, despite the fact that other national organizations (including over 60 national sporting associations) receive operational funding from the federal government.

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<sup>11</sup> Ruth Rose, “Let’s Eliminate Discrimination Against Women in Employment Insurance: Brief to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA)” (April 2021), online (pdf): *House of Commons* <<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/HUMA/Brief/BR11240855/br-external/ConseilDinterventionPourLacesDesFemmesAuTravail-10416287-e.pdf> / <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/FINA/Brief/BR12563924/br-external/MouvementAutonomeEtSolidaireDesSans-Emploi-10810074-e.pdf>> [perma.cc/B999-RJGA].

<sup>12</sup> Women and Gender Equality Canada. “Facts, stats, and impact: Gender equality”, (9 December 2025), online: *Canada.ca* <<https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-equality/facts-stats-impact.html>>.

Further, given their national scope, these organizations (with very few exceptions) cannot access funding from other levels of government or from many other funding bodies,<sup>13</sup> nor does the NAP include funding for national-level work.

**With operational funding of \$10 million per year over five years, NWROs can be well-positioned to contribute to a stronger, more resilient Canada, including through:**

- Helping address the ongoing gender-based violence epidemic
- Supporting the participation of women, trans, and non-binary people in the labour market and economy
- Pushing back against growing extremist movements rooted in misogyny and hate

Elected officials, government departments, House of Commons and Senate committees, and other political and policy actors regularly call on NWROs to help inform federal level policy and legislation. This expertise helps the government do more while spending less on its own operations, but requires NWROs to have sufficient capacity.

NWROs help ensure that equality – a core Canadian value – is embedded within much of the country’s key national infrastructure. Investing in NWROs is an investment in a future that is strong, resilient, and uniquely Canadian.

**About the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)**

LEAF is a national, charitable, non-profit organization that works towards ensuring the law guarantees substantive equality for all women, girls, trans, and non-binary people. LEAF has long-standing expertise in gender-based violence, including both prevention and legal responses. LEAF has developed expertise in the gendered and intersectional impacts of social benefit and insurance schemes by intervening in key cases and by making submissions to Parliament. Learn more about LEAF at [www.leaf.ca](http://www.leaf.ca).

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<sup>13</sup> The Canadian Women’s Foundation et al. “Resetting Normal: Funding a Thriving Women’s Sector”, (May 2020), online: *The Canadian Women’s Foundation* <<https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Resetting-Normal-Report-Womens-Sector.pdf>>.