



Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

2 Carlton Street, Suite 1404

Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3

Tel.: (416) 977-6619

Fax: (416) 977-1227

E-mail: oaith@web.ca

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario
Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

November 1, 2011

Dear Premier McGuinty:

On the first day of Woman Abuse Awareness Month in Ontario, I am writing on behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) to ask for your support to publicly oppose the cancellation of the federal gun registry and the destruction of its records. The position of the Ontario government can make a difference in federal decision-making on this issue.

Much of the debate on this issue has focused on the rights of hunters or the needs of rural communities. There has been little to no discussion about how the gun registry relates to the rights of *women*. There is no right to own a gun in Canada. But women in Canada have the right as citizens to safety and security of their person. Long guns have threatened that right. The presence of the gun registry has proven to decrease the threat.

Firearms are believed to play an important role in explaining the disproportionate number of violence against women related homicides in rural and remote areas. A 2010 report by the Victim/Witness Assistance Program of East Region, Ontario, notes that women in the rural community of Grey-Bruce "reported the use of or threat with a weapon at more than twice the national rate as reported in the Stats Canada Family Violence Survey"¹. Accordingly, the High Risk Review Assessment Tool for Domestic/Partner Violence of South Hastings, Prince Edward County, Ontario lists "Partner has a gun or has easy access to one" as the fourth out of eleven high risk indicators used to assess the risk of lethality for women living with or leaving a relationship where there has been past violence against a woman². In fact, *almost every region in Ontario, rural or urban*, includes screening for access to firearms in their assessment of women's safety in 'domestic violence' investigations. When the registry and current records are scrapped, these firearms will become invisible.

The convergence of long guns and violence against women has been largely minimized or dismissed in the political debate on the registry. Now, with the federal decision upon us, women's rights continue to be ignored. The loss of the registry and its records increases women's—particularly rural women's—vulnerability to woman abuse and sexual assault. .
Women's disproportionate vulnerability to woman abuse and sexual assault, in

¹ Kasdorff, Deborah and Barbara Erb. "Serving Victims of Violence in Rural Communities: Challenges and Best Practices". Victim/Witness Assistance Program, East Region, January 2010, 13

² *High Risk Review Assessment (Domestic/Partner Violence)*, HART Centre and South Hastings, Prince Edward County, and DART Bancroft, p. 1

particular, means that women's experience of violence in relationship to the threat of gun violence is different than men's experience of the same threat.

OAITH, in concert with the Step it Up Campaign and many other women's groups, urges your government to consider the needs of women in your assessment and response to this important issue. In particular, we ask that you:

- In alliance with Quebec's provincial response, tell the federal government that Ontario will maintain Ontario data from the federal long-gun registry
- **Publicly oppose the loss of the gun registry for long-guns in support of women's safety and right to personal security of the person**
- Challenge the federal government's intention to fast-track the bill to end the registry through the House of Commons. This action is clearly intended to limit debate on the subject, which in itself is an undemocratic action
- Challenge the federal government's intention to limit debate. This issue requires debate—public opinion across provinces and demographics is not unanimous and the decision to destroy the registry and its records is a misuse of taxpayers' money already spent on the registry, or needed to re-establish it in the future.
- Consider how to create enforceable best practices that strengthen the registry's compliance measures
- Consult with survivors of long gun violence, including those who survived the Montreal Massacre and rural survivors of woman abuse. Incorporate their expertise in future reviews of gun-related policy and law, as was done following the December 6, 1989 tragedy
- Consult with service providers and women's advocates that support women experiencing violence, and incorporate their expertise in future reviews of gun-related policy and law.

Although setting up the registry may initially have been expensive, it has reaped rewards in the protection of human lives; ongoing maintenance is not costly, especially compared to the costs to women and children or to the government in related inquests, prosecutions of violent men who use guns and incarceration of offenders. Addressing violence against women is a financial investment well worth making.

Women look forward to a response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Eileen Morrow, Coordinator
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)

Cc: Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues
Ted Hudak, Leader of the Opposition
Andrea Horwath, Leader of the NDP
Laurie Scott, PC Critic for Women's Issues
Cheri DiNovo, NDP Critic for Women's Issues