

For Immediate Release:

**Senate Study of Long-Gun Registry Bill Excludes Services for Abused Women
*No analysis of Bill C-19's gender impact, say women's organizations***

OTTAWA (April 2, 2012) – The potential impacts of Bill C-19 on women facing violence will not be reviewed by the Senate before it votes on the bill to dismantle the long-gun registry. Service providers supporting abused women and women's organizations from across Canada, including the BC Society of Transition Houses, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters, the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH), Fédération de ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec, Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI Family Violence Prevention Services, , the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, the Ottawa Coalition To End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW), and the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) reacted with shock at the Senate's decision to close their study of Bill C-19 - Ending the Long Gun Registry Act without hearing from professionals working with women facing violence. Despite requests to appear from a number of violence against women (VAW) service providers, the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs did not include a single one among 30 witnesses they invited to appear.

"This blatant exclusion is extremely troubling" said Brenda Wallace, CFUW National President. "During the House of Commons study, women's organizations were given only limited opportunities to provide input, and even then, our recommendations were completely disregarded. At a UN meeting in February, Status of Women Minister Rona Ambrose admitted that no gender based analysis of the Bill had been done. Now it seems as if the Senate is trying to silence women's concerns all together. We need to be heard."

The Committee heard testimony from witnesses over four days. On the final day of presentations, March 29th, three panels had originally been scheduled; however this was changed to two panels at the last minute, indicating time was available in the schedule for additional witnesses.

Shelters, transition houses and other groups working to end violence against women are deeply concerned about unexpected provisions in Bill C-19, which, will not only dismantle the long gun registry, but remove mandatory verification of a buyer's licence when purchasing a gun, and end requirements for firearms dealers to maintain records of sale.

"Many people are unaware that these changes are in the bill, and that they could have severe ramifications for the safety of women and children" said Stefanie Lomatski, Executive Director of OCTEVAW.

Amendments to close these dangerous loopholes in Bill C-19 were rejected at Committee in spite of witnesses repeatedly stressing the added risk to public safety.

“This bill seriously weakens the ability of police to remove weapons from men who pose a threat to their families, and makes it much easier for them to purchase long guns with fake or invalid licences. This is a very dangerous change for the women we serve,” said YWCA Canada CEO Paulette Senior.

A prime example of the danger this poses is the 1998 Arlene May murder case. Arlene May was shot to death with a long gun her ex-boyfriend procured with a revoked license that was never removed from his possession. The Coroner’s Inquest identified the lack of mandatory licence validation as a major loophole in the system at the time.

"Too many women like Arlene May have already died at the end of a long gun. Taking away protection provided by licence checks means there are sure to be many more," said Eileen Morrow, Coordinator of the OAITH.

“Advocates of Bill C-19 have contended that our position is purely based on emotion. As I stated during the SECU committee hearings on this piece of legislation this past November, such a statement is inappropriate because it challenges the word of those most intimately affected by gun violence, the victims themselves,” said Manon Monastesse, Provincial Director of the Fédération de ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec. “The Quebec Government has developed a policy on domestic violence, of which one of the guiding principles is to ensure the safety of victims of domestic violence. It also implemented three action plans, which contain specific measures for law enforcement and the family law system. Among these provisions, in the Manual of Police Practices, there is a requirement for the police to confiscate firearms. Clearly, emotion is no longer a factor, as our position has become official government policy.”

Tony Bernardo, Executive Director of the Canadian Shooting Sports Association (CSSA) and a member of the Public Safety Minister’s Firearms Advisory Committee, used his testimony to the Senate Committee to push for more reductions in safety measures by opposing the spousal notification system that is part of the process to obtain a gun licence. Spousal notification is a critical component of the licensing system to help protect vulnerable women.

“Eliminating the notification would have very obvious and serious implications for women’s safety. We are all left wondering why the CSSA is able to have such a prominent voice in this process, while women’s services providers who deal with these issues every day are excluded completely,” said Carolyn Goard of the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters.

The Senate should exercise due diligence by ensuring that the gendered impacts of the legislation are properly understood and addressed. This requires listening to the organizations that work with and represent women experiencing violence.