

**OAITH Deputation: Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs**

**Presenter: Marlene Ham, Executive Director, OAITH**

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**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for your presentation. Now we'll go to the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** My name is Marlene Ham. I work as the executive director at the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. I would like to thank the Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for accepting my request to present to you today. A written submission along with our recommendations to the Ministry of Finance have been provided for your records, so you have all of that as well.

OAITH is a provincial association representing over 80 violence against women shelters, transitional housing and community-based organizations.

I would like to start off by letting members today know that I began my work in the VAW sector 21 years ago right here in Simcoe county, which was actually on the heels of the inquest into the death of Arlene May, shortly followed by an inquest into the death of Gillian Hadley. When I reflect back to that time in this community, I recall services and systems that were more intently guided and informed by the recommendations of those inquests. The safety of women and their children was taken seriously and prioritized. When communities go through an inquest, it changes what you do and how you do it. But I'm here today because, 21 years later, I've seen system response and resources become depleted, watered down and where survivors' safety isn't prioritized. I've seen the demands for service change, court systems change, and the complexity of trauma and severity of violence and risk has increased for survivors. Fast-forward all these years later, and we now have another 86 recommendations, with many of them the same from prior inquests. And we've now just learned that there will be an inquest into the death of Keira Kagan.

As much as there have been changes that have led to negative outcomes, there have also been positive changes. We are also in a time when more change is possible and within reach through the implementation of the National Action Plan; recommendations from inquests and the community; members of Parliament and civil service who are more informed, knowledgeable and engaged to address gender-based violence than ever before.

I'm here today to propose to you a \$60-million investment—I know, it's a lot—into the core operating budgets to sustain and maintain the myriad of services that violence against women shelters deliver across Ontario. There were 10 broad recommendations made to the Ministry of Finance, so I will only focus on a few today.

Funding increases and annualization: OAITH has worked with a data sample representing nearly 40% of our members to highlight to the standing committee the proportion of our members who are fundraising for basic core programs. As you will see, over 75% have reported that they must fundraise to offset the costs of providing shelter, and on average, the data sample is fundraising close to \$300,000 annually. Similarly, close to 70% are having to fundraise to offset costs to the transitional housing and support program, and on average, they're reporting approximately \$72,000 annually. Fundraised dollars are being used to offset core programs, and I realize fundraising will always be a part of their operations. However, as the information in our submission indicates, my concern is that they become over-reliant, and this has created disparity and competition between those who can fundraise and those who can't. There are 95 shelters in Ontario funded through MCCSS, so this is—I would call it—a substantial shortfall in funding.

We recommend that the National Action Plan investments prioritize existing programs and services and the creation of culturally specific ones; funding flexibility remain in place; funding be allotted for digital transformation and IT infrastructure; funding be allotted for minor renovations and alterations to shelters to create physical environments more conducive to survivor needs; budgetary planning to allow for actual costs for operating of our programs; and annual budget submissions should include annual increases to match inflation and cost of living index, which they don't currently do.

In infection prevention and control:

- that COVID residential relief be stabilized and transformed so that shelters can hire staff to clean and prepare food to maintain IPAC measures;
- continued access through provincial procurement for all PPE supplies at no additional cost to the shelters; and
- continued access to IPAC training and resources.

In workforce stabilization:

- that all gender-based violence services and programs be included in any government planning on workforce and labour strategies to address our current staffing crisis;

—that a base rate of pay model be explored with VAW shelters and funding be provided for this;  
—that all shelters have funding allotted to them to ensure 24-hour double staffing is implemented; and  
—that funding for training and capacity building continue to be made available to OAITH.

One of our members has shared with us the impact they are facing if their budget doesn't increase in 2023 by stating, "Trauma-informed approaches to address mental health of adult survivors and their children are really important to the work. And a springboard to that is annualizing these in year funding allotments of both" Transitional and Housing Support Program dollars and child and youth mental health—there are also rural realities that they get. "And of course, an increase in our budget would be great, to meet this rate of inflation and cost of living. We all know that if we receive the same funding as last year, we'll be operating at a deficit of between 8.6% to 16.6%. This is a cut in one to two positions. The backlash is serving less families who are at risk of femicide or are in immediate danger."

Ultimately, with a \$60-million investment to shelters, in combination with the development of housing, increased income supports and improved criminal and—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** One minute, okay—family court systems, we will see better outcomes that prioritize survivor safety.

Finally, I would like to thank Minister Williams, Minister Fullerton and Minister Parsa, their staff and those in civil service who have been working very closely with OAITH and our members to build a non-violent community in Ontario. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the presentations and we'll start the questioning. This round will be started with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks, Jason, Joanne and Marlene, for your presentations—much appreciated.

I think I'm just going to start with you, Marlene, because the stats are not getting any better and we all have interacted with or have these intersections in our communities. Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region has had to turn women and their children away, and so I just want to get to the heart of the matter. This is a societal and a cultural

issue and an education issue. We can have more inquests, more working tables and more round tables—it's enough, right? It's enough.

So this is a resource issue in that we need the people to be able to do training, as you talk about your workforce, but we also need the space. Can you speak to the number of—you said that it's 90? I think it's 90?

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** Yes, 95 shelters.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Ninety-five shelters that are overflowing in Ontario. Just unpack the \$60 million a little bit—high level, but make it count because we need to get the resources into the communities.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** In terms of when women call and they're looking for bed space, they might not be able to get it. Really, the issue is, we have a system that was designed in the 1970s and into the 1980s, under different times and different governments. At that time, families would be staying in a shelter for about six weeks. Now they're staying in a shelter for a year—upwards to a year—and the reason for that is because there's no housing.

The longer it takes to find housing, the longer women and children have to stay in a shelter. The longer they stay in a shelter, the more, for women who do call to try and get bed space, we have to try and find them bed space somewhere else. So that's the bottleneck that we're experiencing. We're in a housing crisis, and as long as that housing crisis is in place, we're going to continue to be on this hamster wheel.

That's why we've also called for some investments into transitional housing that's specific for survivors of gender-based violence, because they come into shelter for that emergency response. Getting them situated into transitional housing before they can find more permanent and affordable housing would definitely help. So I don't think creating a thousand new shelter beds is the solution; the solution is that we need housing so that we can have some movement in our shelter system.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That is the key piece. I think that this committee—we've travelled all over the province and we've heard that housing is health care; housing is a human right; housing connects to the economy, equality, health and safety. So that is the key piece, and that is why we need to get housing right in Ontario. There's no doubt about it.

Also, thank you for raising the very key piece that we are fundraising to keep women safe, and that is unacceptable in a province that has \$3.5 billion in an unallocated contingency fund. The money is there.

I thought your presentation was very powerful, so thank you for that.

Joanne, the Alzheimer Society did present to us—thank you for sharing your story and the fact that you're a caregiver—and they also are making the case for respite for caregivers, because it's not sustainable. They mentioned that if we don't act now and invest, Ontario's hospitals will solely exist to house and care for those who have dementia or Alzheimer's. Our hospitals will be full if we don't have a comprehensive home care strategy that is supported through various Ontario health teams and ministries. So I wanted to thank you for that—and also the call-out for caregivers, who predominantly are women in our society.

Jason, you had a really timely presentation for this committee. You're quite right that we've seen the rise in hate. Social media seems to have accelerated it. Some people feel very emboldened to say whatever on a social media platform that they would never, of course, say to your face.

I want you to really direct your ask around the secretariat to us and tell us what that would do, exactly. I know you have the one-stop portal to address issues with the community, but can you speak to the value of actually establishing a secretariat, please?

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** Basically, the importance of a secretariat is, it's somewhere for us to go as a community. That has been the challenge we've had. We've all had the smiles and waves—and I'm not just saying it's from this government; it's previous ones, federal, provincial, it doesn't matter—but we've never had the opportunity to present in a way that we could bring our communities together and say, "This is what's going on. We've got some ideas that we could work with and work with you." We've never had the opportunity to go to somebody who's actually within the government to say that, and I think that has been the biggest stumbling block for so many things, whether it's grants, hate—how do we combat, awareness programs—just in general, gender-affirming health care, how important that is. The government needs something like that that will actually take that information and give it to the government, so we can start putting it in our policies and our budgets and stuff like that, where we can start seeing the benefits of saving the government millions of dollars because we're putting things in place. Also, Prides and community organizations—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have one minute.

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** —help recover the economy based on economic impact in our local communities, and this is one of the biggest things that this government has

missed, sadly. This is why we need the support. If you want to enact an economic recovery, we are the ones who are going to help you do that.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, and that's an inclusive strategy.

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** Very inclusive.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The quote that you gave us, "When the Pride thrives, the entire community"—who is—

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** That's actually from the United Nations; Carlos Massieu is the representation around gender issues. They've done a study that showed that if any marginalized community like the LGBT thrives in your community, everybody thrives in the community.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, and that's a timely message. How much time?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Twelve seconds.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I want to say thank you and for your advocacy. All of you—really powerful presentations.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here. It's interesting that you were grouped together, maybe by coincidence or design, but all about serving and helping either under-represented groups or groups who are vulnerable, people who need care and service. It's really, really impactful to hear all of your statements.

I'll probably just start in order here, so, Jason, maybe I'll start with you. Are there other states or provinces where there's a secretariat and there's some evidence around how that would help? I think it's a really interesting idea. It's not one I've heard before. I just wanted to know if you could share a little bit about where you got the idea or if you've seen it working in other places.

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** It was actually a presentation to the federal government of Canada that actually developed a secretariat that has helped Prides across Canada and marginalized groups be able to focus in on how we can do better and how we communicate. It's gotten to the point where over 160 Pride organizations come together almost every year to talk about advocacy issues, government, provinces, what's going on. Actually, I'm going to that one in March.

It's a great way to learn that, and also understanding streamlining grant applications for community organizations. They're complicated. I'm still sorting out an Ontario one from last year. Like with reporting, it's the amount of work that goes into it. And we're all volunteers, the majority of us. We don't have any capacity funding whatsoever, which is a shame because many organizations like we've heard today need that capacity funding to improve and make changes and change things for better and speak to government and all these issues.

There's so much. Homelessness: LGBT youth account for over 50% of homeless youth in this country. It's not just Ontario, but this country. It's absurd to us. Why are we not dealing with those? But this is what Pride organizations and community organizations, now coming together, are coming to realize. We need that voice. We need that person. We can't all just pick somebody because then we silence someone, and we're not prepared to do that.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** That's excellent. And I appreciate your comment and MPP Fife's question about the statement about thriving. I think one of Toronto's leading urban planners and academics, Richard Florida, has talked about that too. Again, there's lots of evidence that when those communities thrive, it brings together lots of other communities and reduces the hatred. It makes us more inclusive. So thank you.

Let me move to Joanne. Joanne, first of all, thank you for the care that you give to your family member. I'm sure it is very draining and demanding. I wanted to know if you could just talk a little bit about how you do, as a caregiver, access the opportunity for care in home care, how you found that experience and what lessons we could learn to make that better for people like you who are giving their time and energy.

**Ms. Joanne Kaattari:** That's a great question. I don't think anyone has ever asked me that. Thanks.

Because Huntington's has the dementia aspect, but then also the physical aspects—it has the Parkinson's, the ALS and the dementia—it's very complex. So we're trying to pull on all kinds of supports, say, from Alzheimer Society for their support groups or that type of thing. But the home care system, which is very overrun right now—it's difficult to get, really, any home care, so that's—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Joanne Kaattari:** —a more difficult piece. But also, we're trying to get social services help, whether it's counselling or Meals on Wheels. Your office has helped me

with some—we needed some help around getting IDs for—everything is so difficult when someone has young dementia and a disease that is not well known. So thank you for that. I hope I answered it a little bit.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you. And I'll move to Marlene. Marlene, thank you. We hear a lot about violence against women. You talked about some of the work that's being done to improve it. When you think about the actions from these various task forces and recommendations, how confident are you that the government is listening and hearing those and moving on them? And again, which ones would you ask them to prioritize?

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** I think the fact that we have—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** I'm sorry, but she didn't leave any time for—

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** Hey, that's fine. I can wait for the next one.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the government side. MPP Smith.

**Mr. David Smith:** I want to thank the panel for presenting here today. My first—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Mr. Smith, if you could get closer to the microphone. Thank you.

**Mr. David Smith:** My first question I want to ask is for North Bay Pride. Thank you very much, Jason, for presenting here today. You made mention of the secretariat—but how large is your organization, if I can call it that?

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** You might need to clarify that because what do you mean by—the community or are you talking about how many are in Ontario?

**Mr. David Smith:** The North Bay Pride: How large is that organization?

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** We have a board of directors of six and about 65 volunteers.

**Mr. David Smith:** I heard you mention that the applications are difficult to file—

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** They are challenging, yes.

**Mr. David Smith:** Could you explain what you meant by that?



**Mr. Jason Maclennan:** There are several questions that you have to do. First, you have to meet the criteria of the grant, which sometimes is very confusing and overwhelming—just to make sure that you meet the criteria of that application. If you meet the criteria, then you have to sit down and you have to bring financials together, which is understandable, and you've got to answer all kinds of questions. It takes us about 40 hours, on average, to actually do a grant application in the province of Ontario, if we meet the criteria. We're all volunteers with jobs, so it becomes very time-consuming. Then it's this ongoing back-and-forth with government officials about clarifying how you're going to do that event, when we're trying to plan something a year in advance. There are some things we can't even know in order to do that, because we can't book things, because we don't know what we're doing until we get a little bit closer.

**Mr. David Smith:** Do you think the secretariat will help in this regard?

**Mr. Jason Maclennan:** I think the secretariat will start identifying some key things in the systems that need to change. For example, on an application, you should have "preferred name" and not just "given name"; you should have "male," "female" and "other." That's where you're going to start to see the change. Then you'll start seeing the funding and everything that we need as well.

**Mr. David Smith:** Also, I like what you said: "Hate has no home here." I'm not sure if you were speaking about "here" as in here or all of Canada. But it's a clear statement. I love those comments.

My next question goes out to Joanne. Huntington's disease is very concerning. You're seeing it first-hand right in your home and in the community, and I'm glad that you're playing the role you're playing.

Your organization provides and facilitates a large number of services. Are there particular activities of the Huntington Society of Canada that you'd like to highlight for us at this committee?

**Ms. Joanne Kaattari:** We're the local organization. The big parent organization, Huntington's Canada, is phenomenal. It's all private donations, as they don't get government funding—we wish we did. It's from donor families and pharmaceuticals—because there's a lot of research going on, because it's a brain disorder. We have social workers who are very knowledgeable about Huntington's and neurologists who are funded by the society, because nobody knows our disease—most family doctors might encounter one person in their practice in their entire career. They give us access to all these specialist services and support groups and counselling. If we have a problem, they'll intervene for us, to educate a doctor, educate—so, yes, they're amazing.

**Mr. David Smith:** Thank you very much. I'm going to yield my time to MPP Khanjin.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Khanjin.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Thank you, each and every one of you, for your presentations and the amount of work that you're doing to make people's lives much better. You impact everyone's lives quite a bit. I appreciated your opening remarks.

I want to start with Joanne, because I know some of the things that you've raised with my team especially—and you mentioned that the wraparound supports, if they existed, would have been great in trying to break down the silos. In your perfect world, how do you see the systems working? We've got the paramedic system that's being rolled out so we could have a little bit more home care to help with that, but then there's still that ability of the caregiver who—a lot of the pressure is on them. If they're the sandwich generation, then they've got their little kids to take care of and then they've got their adult. So they've got a bit of everything. And if you have Huntington's at a younger age, it complicates that caregiver experience. Where do you see the relief valves for those particular families?

**Ms. Joanne Kaattari:** I think it's really knowing there's help out there in your community, whether it's through the LHIN—I don't know its new name; sorry—or, in our case, the Huntington or Alzheimer societies. There's more in your community than you know. I know that because I just research by nature, but not everybody does. In fact, a lot of people don't.

It's almost more of an education component: Call Ontario 211. That's a brilliant organization. I think there's more out there than we know. There are system navigators. We've all mentioned that there are people waiting to help and they don't know where to find it, whether it's a volunteer to read to someone who has lost their eyesight—that's out there; you just have to know where to find it, but people don't. So I think that whole system navigator piece, for all kinds of things in the health care system and beyond, is really key.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Like a one-stop shop so that people have an easier way to navigate, whether it's the family health team or what have you. Thank you.

Could you comment on any ideas in terms of help for caregivers, like a caregiver tax credit? Or what would be helpful to support you financially?

**Ms. Joanne Kaattari:** Well, definitely a caregiver advisory group to just keep reminding everyone that we're a backbone here for health care, and not extraneous to it. But yes,

definitely, tax breaks would help, or more advice on how to modify your home, because you don't know that. You don't know how to do that and, all of a sudden, you're facing that. I know, in other places, they might have a small monthly stipend for caregivers. Those are some things that come to mind.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll go to the opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters who have arrived at committee today.

My first comments are to Jason. First and foremost, I just wanted to thank you for your courage, for the example that you set for your community. You're living your life, you're setting an example to all, to young people, and you're also advocating for change in the community. I think you've pointed out the importance of pink tourism, the economic benefit, the \$60 billion that that could add to the province, as well as your local stories of filling hotels and using a venue that wasn't normally open.

Also, you cited the politics of division that some have, quite frankly, actively added to at this time, and how prominent hate has been. But from your comments, I think it's important for us to recognize that human rights is not a zero-sum game, that equity is bringing others up. It's not taking a spot from someone else; it's bringing others along.

So I think your recommendation for a secretariat is a wise one. People do not know what they do not know until they have those voices to show them what is missing, what could be changed. And it's many of the simple steps that you've pointed out.

I want to know, if this committee and this government were to fund such a thing, how is this different than performative allyship.

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** That is actually a really good question. Thank you, MPP. I appreciate that. First of all, I think the appointment of a secretariat has to come from the community. I don't think you can have—sorry; if you're straight, I don't think that's a great way to go. Or if you're part of the marginalized community, you've got to be that voice, you've got to be in that position that you're listened to.

But the reality is that there's an opportunity to combat hate on so many levels, for so many. We can address certain things with that voice. However, the biggest thing that we're looking for now—I know, everybody, and I'm sure I'm speaking to both sides of the House—is that economic recovery.

People don't travel to where there's hate. I'm not going to travel to 68 countries in the world because I'm going to be put to death. I'm not going to travel to the ones where I'm going to end up in prison. I'm not going to travel to the ones that experience hate in the public, or protest. We need to deal with those things. We need to do that through awareness campaigns, and the government has to support those. Once we get that in order, we will get the tourism dollars in those remote communities that have those Pride organizations and community events, because we have proven in North Bay that people will travel for the right reasons. They're supportive, and they spend their money, and that's the most important thing—besides the equity and inclusion, of course. If you want to recover, we've got to recover.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. It's a situation where everybody wins and there's a great financial incentive after the fact. Thank you very much for your comments—a really interesting presentation, and I look forward to seeing more about it.

My next questions will be for Joanne. You talked about being a care partner, and we did hear from the Alzheimer Society. I want to thank you also for mentioning their First Link Care Navigator program. It's so incredibly important to have that one door of service, because people are, quite frankly, overworked. Being a care partner is a thankless job most times, and providing those resources is so incredibly important. We heard about how the government can buttress that system by providing already promised funding that was never released, but it does relieve pressure on ERs, and it helps keep people at home where they are more healthy—body, mind and soul. So thank you for your presentation.

I wanted to ask Marlene: Your \$60-million ask—we've seen cuts to funding for shelters year over year, and it's shocking to think that 70% have to fundraise to offset their operational costs. You're relying on the goodwill of the community to do the good work that is absolutely necessary. So many folks are also relegated to couch-surfing, but I think your statistic about families staying in shelter more than a year is quite scary for everyone.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** Yes. To be fair—and for the record—I do want to be able to say that the shelters haven't received a funding cut under this government. I do need to be fair about that. That hasn't occurred. There has been in-year funding that has continued to come, which has been good. But our ask is that that needs to be annualized. They need to be able to rely on that.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Understood.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** However, when funding doesn't increase and costs of the shelter continue to increase, that has a trickle-down effect. While government might not be cutting funding, by not increasing funding to keep pace with inflation and rising costs, that trickles down to shelters having to make some really hard decisions.

I just want to clarify that and be clear about that, for sure. And the reality, like MPP Fife pointed out, was that the community members are subsidizing a significant portion of the cost for shelters, and that's through fundraising. We're seeing that across the board, across all shelters, but across different program lines as well. The program lines are clearly laid out in the submission. Shelter is one, and then they have different programs.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** And shelters are responding to need. We're a bit of a unique service in that if a woman calls and needs support or survivors need support, they're going to respond, because if they don't respond, then they risk someone being in a very dangerous situation and perhaps even being killed. That's where they will pull out cots; they will pull in extra staff. They will do those pieces to respond, because we are a unique service in that they're providing emergency safety for survivors and their children across Ontario.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Well, I just want to thank you. I think your recommendation for double staffing makes great sense. I don't want to ask you any questions with such dwindling time left, but I want to thank you for honouring the voice and the life of Keira Kagan. It's an absolutely devastating story, and Jennifer has done tremendous work to bring awareness to this issue. This is something that has to change so that people are aware and recognize the signs of domestic violence.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. We'll go to the next questioner. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Marlene, I left off with you just trying to summarize or give us a flavour of the confidence you have in the government's ability or willingness to implement the recommendations. I know you've got 10 priorities in here. I wonder if you could just tie those back to the actual recommendations from the inquest and what you would like to see further from—not just the money side of things, but the other side of things in terms of the inquest recommendations.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** I think funding, obviously, is a big part of what I'm going to bring forth. However, we also know that funding on its own isn't going to be enough, right? It's not going to solve all issues and all problems, and that is where the implementation of

the National Action Plan plays a really important role and also, of course, the 86 recommendations that came out of the inquest. Some of those really were related specifically to our sector, but some of them were not. They're related to a broad range of different ministries, services and systems. We have to look at all of that together, and we also need a measurable plan.

We need to be able to—we look at some of our traditional outputs, but some of those traditional outputs are not necessarily achieving the outcomes, particularly around safety and well-being. So a woman can come into the shelter, we can find her housing, but does that mean she's safe? No, it doesn't, because he's harassing her through the court system, he's harassing her through Family Court, he's harassing her through child welfare. So we have an output, but it's not necessarily getting to that outcome.

We can't just singularly look at the shelter system. We have to look across ministries. This doesn't just sit with MCCSS; this sits with a whole-of-government approach. And so, with the National Action Plan, with the pillars, we have to bring all of that together in one place.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Certainly, we've called on the government to continue that work, to implement those actions, because they've been out for a while now and I don't think we're seeing the pace that we'd like. Again, thank you for your submission today, and I do hope the funding comes.

I want to come back to Jason and just for a moment talk about the economy, because I'm the finance critic for the Liberal Party and my first private member's bill is actually about rebuilding. It's called the Building Better Business Outcomes Act, and it's related to having diversity on corporate boards.

I absolutely believe in diversity and that it actually does build up our economy. I would like you to, if you could, just talk a little bit more about what you think—again, you talked about the federal secretariat and how you'd like a provincial one, how you think they could work together to really advance the rebuilding of the economy and build pink tourism here in Ontario.

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** Just so you know, there are some European countries that have done this very successfully as well. There seems to be a battle between federal and provincial very often about different things: "Well, this is your responsibility. This is your responsibility."

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jason MacLennan:** Tourism and economic recovery is everybody's responsibility. The ability for our secretariat and the federal secretariat to work together in a way that will actually benefit all of tourism and all communities would be the answer, because that would actually streamline the things that we need and those who identify—especially on board diversity. It's a huge prime example of something that needs to happen.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Again, I think it's a really great idea. Thank you for your presentation today and thank you to all of you for being here.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the government. MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you, Marlene, for coming and sharing, and thank you to the other witnesses for sharing their input with us. These are valuable inputs.

Marlene, I want to thank you for exploring and expanding on the various issues related—this is a very complicated, very comprehensive issue. It will not be solved overnight; we know that. In our government, we are committed that this phenomenon in our society should end, and we're doing everything possible through financial, legislative, punitive measures to prevent this happening to any women in our society, because it can happen to anyone. It could happen to our mothers, sisters, daughters etc. So this is a very sensitive issue.

That's why our government has, in 2021-22, invested \$191 million to help victims of violence and \$11 million for violence-prevention initiatives. We fund services and supports such as emergency shelters, counselling, 24-hour crisis lines, safety planning and transitional housing supports. We have invested an additional \$2.1 million over three years to expand victim and sexual assault services in underserved communities. We are also providing \$18.5 million to support victims of domestic violence and survivors of human trafficking to find and maintain affordable housing through transitional housing support.

I know that all of these initiatives are not enough, because in light of the pandemic and COVID, things were exacerbated. The mental health aspect is a very important factor; all of us are cognizant of that. We need to find new ways to support your organization and abused women and try to find solutions.

I have a couple of things that come to mind. I would like to explore your opinion on them. First of all, private sector involvement, financially—for example, in many of the hospitals, they have major donors who contribute to the hospital expenses, programs etc.

The other issue that I want you to explore or expand on is the cultural sensitivity of this issue in certain societies where the issue is not addressed and is kept as taboo in their society.

When it comes to the financial aspect, I know that the government does their best, but the government cannot be the final issue-solver. The government doesn't have a magic wand to address all these issues. What do you think—how can we expand this issue? How can we sensitize the public about its cultural and financial aspects?

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** Thank you for the question. The National Action Plan and the investments that are going to the provinces and territories will most definitely help to deal with some of the struggles that we have, depending on how all of that funding gets prioritized.

Does the private sector have a role? Absolutely. However, we don't want to become too over-reliant on that—as much as too over-reliant on the other side—because what I'm talking about in this submission is not extras; we're talking about the basic services that shelters are having to fundraise for. So I say, with caution, that we don't want to over-rely on the private sector.

The reality is, these are government-funded agencies. They're transfer payment agencies, and they're having to offset—and they are; they're fundraising, but it creates a really unpredictable environment. Right now, given all the pieces that you talked about in terms of the pandemic, we need some stability and some predictability, because the rates of femicide have increased and the rates of gender-based violence have increased.

I don't think—others might have another opinion—that \$60 million put into this sector is actually that much money, because community-based services cost a lot less than health, than police and than the criminal justice system. The more you invest into community-based services, the less you're going to have to spend on those other costly systems.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Can you touch upon the cultural-taboo issue in certain societies or groups?

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** What I would say there is when we look at our femicide data, we're seeing femicide victims from all backgrounds—younger women, older women, children of all racial backgrounds, women who have come to Canada, women who were born in Canada.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.



**Ms. Marlene Ham:** So it really cross-cuts all communities. It isn't something that's really pinpointed to one cultural community.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have 44 seconds. Are you done?

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Yes, I'm done.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Okay. I want to thank the panellists for all the time you've taken to prepare to come and talk to us and the message you brought. I'm sure it will be of great assistance as we write a report to the Minister of Finance as to what he should be looking at and including in his budget.