



## **Presentation to Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs**

**Date: Tuesday January 9th, 2024**

**Presenter: Marlene Ham, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses**

**Full Transcript for January 9th:**

**[https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/committees/finance-economic-affairs/parliament-43/transcripts/committee-transcript-2024-jan-09#P737\\_205019](https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/committees/finance-economic-affairs/parliament-43/transcripts/committee-transcript-2024-jan-09#P737_205019)**

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Our next panel is the Ontario association of interval and transitional housing, Lorrie Pepin and Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario—the elementary teachers are joining us virtually. With that, as we come forward, I think we have two of the delegations here: the Ontario association of interval and transitional housing and Lorrie Pepin—oh, it's virtual too, so we only have one here in person.

As they're setting it up here, we will start with the presentation from the association of interval and transitional housing. As with all the others and for the virtual panellists, you'll have seven minutes to make your presentation. At the end of six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Then, it will be cut off at seven minutes, and then we'll go to questions. We also ask that you introduce yourself to make sure the name is correct in Hansard to attribute the comments to the right person.

Thank you very much for being here. We'll start with the Ontario association of interval and transitional housing.

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** My name is Marlene Ham, and I work as the executive director at the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. Thank you to the Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for accepting my request to present to you today. I always appreciate and value this opportunity to educate and provide meaningful and valuable information.

This year, I'm providing the committee with a hard copy of the 2022-23 annual femicide list along with our preliminary provincial snapshot results of sector needs. As this survey is still open to our members, we will be submitting a more comprehensive submission later this month. It will take emotional investment to read through this hard copy of the annual femicide list about the lives of women and children killed last year in Ontario. I don't expect you to read that calendar right now or even today, but I hope when you're ready that you will, because, as MPPs, you have an integral role in supporting systems and services in preventing femicides in Ontario.



OAITH is pleased that the federal and provincial bilateral agreement for the national action plan has been signed, with allocations for 2023-24 being finalized for our member organizations.

Last year, I presented to the same committee asking for a \$60-million investment, and I am here today because that ask remains as accurate as it was last year. To assist the committee in further validating why this investment is needed, I'm going to present to you some of our preliminary data.

First, I want to bring your attention to offsetting revenue required to operate the services of our members who are contracted to deliver these services. As you can see, not much has changed from last year, with significant amounts of fundraised dollars required to ensure we have an emergency shelter system for survivors and their children. Notably, in this small sample, over 60% had to fundraise to offset the basic costs of delivering shelter services, and they reported an average of nearly \$300,000 per year as the shortfall for this program. As you can see in the chart, this only reflects one program. So financial stability of this emergency response system really is at a tipping point today.

There are many factors that got us here, but today I'm going to focus specifically on workforce stabilization and sustainability. Of the organizations who participated, they reported that 46% of their workforce is made up of part-time, relief and contract positions, yet 80% have indicated they have a relief staff shortage. They are struggling to keep services operating at levels that survivors and their children deserve. Respondents were asked to report on the day they filled in the survey the reason for staff absence. There are more people off due to short-term and long-term leave than those who were on vacation in a two-week period. When the sector relies significantly on relief staff, yet 80% are experiencing a relief staff shortage, how can we expect the system to operate at its best? Based on these conditions, we cannot expect much. Again, we have more staff off due to illness, short- and long-term leaves on a given day between December 15 and January 9.

Job vacancies continue to be a pressing concern for our members. In this small sample of organizations, 77% currently have vacant positions in their organizations. Wages and pay equity have been long-standing barriers for a sector primarily staffed by women. In reviewing data of our lowest-paid employees, I'm sure you will all be surprised to know that our lowest-paid relief workers reported to us in this survey were paid \$21.50 per hour, whereas the highest was \$32 per hour. This accounts for a \$10.50 wage difference to do the exact same job. These workers must be highly skilled, yet there's no value for the skills they offer or the circumstances they must navigate or endure.

We know there has been an ongoing turnover in our sector. We learned that 97% of organizations have had a number of employees who have left their jobs in the last year. Only 3% reported they've had no staff leave. Even more concerning, nearly 40% of our organizational leadership has turned over since 2020. Some organizations have had multiple executive directors in this same time frame.

There are a range of retention and recruitment strategies being utilized. While team-building, professional development and job flexibility are being used the most, the top three barriers to keeping staff are wages, competition with higher-paying jobs and serving complex needs. The strategies we use to retain need to actually address the barriers that we're faced with, but they will need funding to be able to do this.

As one of our members outlined, on the issue of sustainability, our agency has to spend a considerable amount of time fundraising for administrative costs. In terms of our operations, we are required to fundraise for our shelter operations the most. Our staffing, building occupancy and food costs are increasing exponentially and, without an increase to our funding, we are falling further and further behind.

Additionally, the HR crisis is a major concern. We need to do more with less resources and people. The greatest pressure for us is on our senior management team, who have no choice but to take on multiple roles when we lose middle managers and front-line staff. As a result, I would state we are in a fragile state when it comes to our operations and stability.

I will ask the committee to let the annual femicide list of the 62 lives taken last year be your compass in understanding what happens when systems and services are left—

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

**Ms. Marlene Ham:** —without adequate supply of housing, adequate staffing, adequate responses, and investment into preventing men's violence.

In the last year alone, members are reporting lengths of stays in shelter have increased by another four weeks, leaving more women and children struggling to find a place to go when they're in danger. Shelters were designed for six-week stays, but, on average, they are now staying seven months. Our shelter system has now become a temporary housing system.

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In this year's provincial budget, what we must see from the government is that ending gender-based violence is a priority, with clear investments and solutions. Ontario-STANDS, the government's strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, will need to make every dollar count, with intention and purpose, to reduce violence and femicide. We are here to stand with you on costing the solutions and collectively working together—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time, so we can finish as we start the rounds of questioning.



## Questions from Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (NDP):** Thank you to our presenters for your really helpful presentation.

I want to just begin with Marlene. Marlene, thank you very much for all your ongoing work. I recognize that you and the sector come into Queen's Park every year, at least once. You bring us these purple scarves and you talk about the issues that are facing Ontario women-identified people who are on the receiving end of violence with respect to—and sometimes even tragic death. This is where we see the rise in femicides.

I know that you have a very—not necessarily you, but you as well. You have a relationship with all of us at Queen's Park. We know you; you are not new to us. Every year we get together on a grand staircase and we take that photo. The sector comes along and we take that photo. So, it really is sad for me to see you here today once again making this request to a group of individuals that you know well, that you worked well with.

The crisis that you're describing in your sector is pretty alarming, especially with respect to staffing and sustainability, so I'm just interested in knowing what you think needs to change with respect to the budgetary requirements for the sector, your sector, to be stabilized this year and to, of course, grow.

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Thank you for the question. I think where things have become really lost over the years—and we're talking about decades—is that the budgeting process for shelters has not ever been based on actual costs, and as years have gone on, they have fallen further and further and further behind. But what I think is really unique about shelters is that no matter the need, they will find a way to respond, right? Ultimately, that's what they've done by fundraising significant amounts of money. They create beds where they're not funded and they fundraise for those beds, because if someone calls for help, they will do whatever they can to be able to respond.

However, on the flip side, the funding that they've received from government since the 1970s, since the 1980s, since the 1990s has never kept pace with the true costs. So for non-profit organizations, they really need to go through a budgeting process in partnership with government around what the actual costs are to be able to create that sustainability. That's been a lot of the discussion that OAITH has been in, both with the opposition and with government, to get us closer to that state of sustainability.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (NDP):**



Hopefully, we will be able to help you get closer, recognizing that the opposition is not able to control the purse strings, as you know—

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

We want to.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (NDP):**

We want to—but we want to be able to support you.

In a recent news announcement made by the provincial government, I read that there's going to be an investment of \$162 million. This is part of the federal action plan to end gender-based violence. We don't have a provincial plan to end gender-based violence, but leaning on the federal funding that's coming into Ontario with \$162 million that needed to be secured only with the production of an Ontario plan. Have you seen this plan? Were you consulted on this plan?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Yes, absolutely. We submitted our national action plan priorities to Minister Williams's office in the fall of 2022 and we've been engaged through OAITH to government. We've provided our priorities to them. There is the Ontario-STANDS plan, and that, ultimately, is the beginning to this process of having a strategy here in Ontario, and a number of the priorities that OAITH submitted have been included. They're not just OAITH's priorities. I imagine there are others in there that are reflected. But there's still a lot of work to do in terms of implementation.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (NDP):**

Are you hopeful that the \$162 million from the federal government will flow through to the sector in a timely fashion considering that you submitted your comments to the plan back in 2022—almost two years ago?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Listen, nothing will come soon enough right now. We definitely are at a tipping point. The shelters, our members, are receiving their allocations this month for this year, but there's still a lot of uncertainty around what that's going to look like over the next three years. It is important for government to be able to create that certainty, and I think they can do that in this provincial budget by clearly outlining the investments and the solutions in the actual budget. I think that's what our members really want to see. They want to see their issues and their needs reflected in that budget.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (NDP):**



Fantastic. Thank you. I mean, especially since the money is coming from the federal government, there should be no reason to delay the funding flowing to the sector.

**Mr. Deepak Anand (PC): Thank you.**

My next question would be to Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. Marlene, thank you so much for coming here. I want to start by saying thank you for all the life-saving work that your organization is doing to represent women in our community, whether it's through the crisis line, emergency shelter or the counselling.

It is very sad to see 62 people on this calendar, and I wish there was a time, maybe it's—whether investing through the better character-building behaviour, whatever it takes, so that we don't have to see this kind of calendar being printed and presented. Each one of them—and I always say one in 62 is about 2%, but for them, for their family, that was not 2%, it was 100%. And that goes with almost everything you see around.

My question to you is, just last month, the government announced an additional investment of \$18.7 million, along with the existing four-year \$1.4-billion investment to support 400 service providers in the area of gender-based violence. What else do we need to do? What else can we do? How do these investments benefit the ability of the organization to represent, to provide the services needed to address gender-based violence?

And another thing, which I quickly want to add: If you can—I mean, I always look at the point of time, the point of time this incident happened when one of our valuable Ontarians lost their life; how we could have avoided it by going a little bit backward and avoiding that impulsive point of time. Thank you.

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Thank you for the question and, certainly, for the acknowledgement of all of these femicide victims.

We have the piece around the money and the investments. Definitely, it will help, particularly this year, and the money that they're receiving to help stabilize our services right now.

Moving forward, there are measures in the Ontario-STANDS plan that need to be achieved. We need to go in the other direction, right? We need to reduce the number of femicides. We need to reduce the number of instances of gender-based violence.

It's not just about this investment. We have to look at the whole entire system of services and support and how that system is working and functioning together. That's why a national action



plan, of course, is important, but it's also why Ontario-STANDS can have some real potential, as long as—and it has to be an across-government approach.

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

Thank you very much. That concludes your time. We'll now move back to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP): Thanks to all delegations.**

Marlene, I'm just going to start with you. Thank you very much for bringing this calendar. I have to say, it was fair warning for you to give to us to be cautious when you read this, because this should be an eye-opener for every member of provincial Parliament—every politician in Ontario, quite honestly.

In the opening, though, of this, you say, "As we rely upon media reporting to determine when women and children have been killed in Ontario there can be missing information, errors or omissions." You go on to say, "The Annual Femicide List captures the femicides and criminal justice charges that we are aware of at the time of publication." But then you do say, "We acknowledge that this is a limitation and doesn't capture all killings or where women are found dead who don't receive any justice at all," and that you continue to monitor the media.

We have the saying at Queen's Park: In order to address a problem, you have to acknowledge that the problem exists. So I'm asking you, do you think Ontario could do a better job of tracking when women are killed? Because if we had that data—do you feel it would make a bigger difference in how governments of all levels see femicide in Ontario?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Yes, absolutely. Thank you for the question. You're actually touching on one of the inquest recommendations. To be able to pull all of our data together as it relates to gender-based violence and femicide would be incredibly beneficial. It helps us to track outcomes. It helps us to determine if a recommendation can be made. We don't necessarily know if it's going to work or not work, but we don't know until we try. Having a mechanism to be able to evaluate different recommendations that have come forth, whether that be through inquest, whether that be through the DVDRC—whatever body that is through, to have a centralized function would absolutely be something that could help us move the needle.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

We often say that if you track it, then you're going to have to deal with it, so this is something that we're very supportive of in the official opposition.



We also have been trying to get the government to acknowledge that femicide is an epidemic. I believe this is also a recommendation. Is it important for us to use this language? Because the language is ultimately key to how people view the importance of an issue.

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Femicide is a global epidemic—

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

But I'm focused on Ontario. I mean, this is what—we're focused on the budget. Is it important for the Ontario government to acknowledge the level of femicides that are happening in this province?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

I think it would be validating.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

Okay. Thank you very much.

Looking at some of your stats, just to follow the money—this is a very good snapshot of how the provincial budget impacts the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. If you look at some of those numbers, could you—I just want you to give us a sense of what these numbers mean. You have, under the shelter, that the average fundraised amount—I mean, we are fundraising to keep women and children safe in Ontario. And then you go on to say, “But the number of organizations receiving the funding”—and then, you go on to the percentage of organizations who need to offset core operating funding, so we're fundraising for operational costs.

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Yes.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

Can you tell me what this looks like at a shelter?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

What this could look like is fundraising for staffing, fundraising for food, fundraising for utilities, fundraising for all of those basic costs based on the needs that they're faced with. There has





been inflation. There have been rising costs. Then, a number of shelters have what we call unfunded beds, so they have the beds—they create the physical beds—but they might not necessarily receive provincial funding for that, so then they fundraise to cover off those costs. That has been a decades-old problem.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

But it's a problem that you want to see resolved?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Yes, absolutely.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

Thank you.

The child witness program, in particular, is an incredibly important program to help children who have witnessed violence or been victims of violence navigate the court system. It has been underfunded for a number of years now. You're saying that in order to operate that program, 38% is fundraised?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Of those organizations that participated. So, of those 13 organizations that participated, 38% of them are fundraising, on average, \$36,000 to be able to cover off the expenses of that program. There are some organizations that are not fundraising, but we do know that 13 of them out of the 30 are.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

Would you say it takes a lot of energy to fundraise when you're operating an organization like the child witness program?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Absolutely.

**Ms. Catherine Fife (NDP):**

Yes, okay. Thank you very much.

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



**MPP Andrea Hazell (Liberal):**

Marlene, the wait-lists for women's shelter beds are concerning. I have been speaking to many shelters in my Scarborough–Guildwood area. There is a long wait-list. There is no bed. Women now are waiting in their cars. That's where they're waiting until a bed becomes available.

The rise in femicide is deeply concerning—and thank you for this; this gives me shivers. Can you tell us, how can increased investment in your sector contribute not only to providing immediate shelter but also to implementing effective, preventive measures and supporting survivors in the long term?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

The investments are going to, for one, improve quality of service, right? That's an important factor in terms of us getting to better outcomes—

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

Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the government side. MPP Riddell.

**Mr. Brian Riddell (PC):**

My question is for Marlene: Can you identify ways in which the anti-human trafficking strategy is helping victims of this horrific crime in Ontario?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

I think one of the shifts we saw, definitely, is we are seeing more organizations getting access to those funds than we have seen in prior years. I think that is important because we do have a really robust service system of supports across Ontario, and so ensuring that we integrate those services, looking at gender-based violence more broadly is critically important. I think that definitely has been a shift that we've seen that has definitely been positive. Some of those investments have gone into violence against women shelters and the variety of different programs that they offer, transitional housing and support program being one of them. Those have all been good and important steps, for sure.

**Mr. Brian Riddell (PC):**

I know we're working at putting one in Cambridge right now and I'd just like to thank you for the work you do. Your calendar is heartbreaking when I look at it, so thank you again for your contributions to this.

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



MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie (PC): I want to thank all of the presenters today.**

Marlene, I will put you on the spot again because I really am intrigued by what you've put forward with the calendar. I want to echo how important this is, that we have the awareness of what is happening in our province and to understand that there are real victims, and they continue to grow in numbers and be targeted—this warrants consideration very much.

I have done some digging, when I just heard some of the earlier comments. I know that some of the Ontario programs do predate the national strategy, particularly the Investing in Women's Futures Program, and that one does come out of provincial funds. I believe the opposition was incorrect with that statement.

But I'm hoping you can explain to us how important both that program might be, how it helps—I mean, I know some of the programs that get this in my region, but also the Women's Economic Security Program. Do you have an awareness of how those programs are used in a typical community?

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Yes, absolutely. When we're going to respond to gender-based violence as a social issue, we have to look at it from all angles. Our system is to move them into shelter, but then what? We need housing. We need economic security. They need supports going through Family Court and criminal court; their children need support. All of that really needs to be able to come together.

So, the economic security programs are critical. They're critical to help move that needle along for survivors. It might not happen immediately while they're in crisis, but as they sort of move along that process, that might be something that they become engaged in, and for some survivors coming in, that is something that they need immediately, because moving them in, putting them into social housing, putting them on income support programs, that can help in some situations. But access to jobs, access to education, access to skilled training—those are critical components to be able to actually see the improved outcomes as we're working with survivors throughout the variation of programs that are available to survivors across Ontario.

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**Mr. Andrew Dowie (PC):**

Thank you, and follow-up?

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

You have 2.4.



**Mr. Andrew Dowie (PC):**

Okay. Thank you, Chair.

One of my local transitional houses is named Hiatus House, and I know they've approached me about the importance of offering transitional housing and the length of time so that the victim of violence—intimate partner violence, specifically—does not have to be put into a situation where they go back to their abuser. I'm wondering if you can give us a sense of how is the need in the province for the establishment of housing options that provide that opportunity for women to transition away from those households so that they can rebuild their lives and get back onto the path for success.

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):**

Absolutely. I think understanding the emergency shelter system from the transitional housing system—so the biggest issue we have now is there is capital to build that transitional housing, but there's no operating to sustain it. That would be a critical area of need.

We also don't want the pendulum to swing from here to over here. We need both systems operating well so that we don't move the bottleneck in the shelter system over to a bottleneck in the transitional housing and support system. We have to look at ensuring that we have all different types of housing available to be able to make all of that work in cohesion together.

In terms of the period of time, in some transitional housing settings, that could be up to four years—

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

**Ms. Marlene Ham (OAITH):** —and that's very, very helpful for survivors, because the systems that they have to engage in—on average, 11 different systems and services the survivor has to engage in just to leave an abusive relationship, which is atrocious. People should be able to leave a bad situation if they want to without having to have so many systems involved in their life. But those systems are taking longer and longer—Family Court, longer and longer. It doesn't take six weeks to go through Family Court; it can take 10 years to go through Family Court. Right? We need that kind of system and support, particularly for those who need a longer period of time to go through that healing process.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie (PC):**

Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much, and as long as it takes me to say thank you, your time is now up. So thank you.**



**That also concludes the time for this panel, so we want to thank those at the table and we also want to thank those virtually for taking the time to prepare and to be with us this afternoon to present your ideas of what we can deal with in the upcoming budget.**