

October 30, 2024

Hon. David Eby, Premier of British Columbia

Office of the Premier
Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
501 Belleville St., Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
By email: premier@gov.bc.ca

RE: Declare Gender-based Violence an Epidemic in British Columbia

Dear Premier Eby,

We are writing today as advocates, experts and concerned service providers who support survivors of gender-based violence.

In your election platform, you highlighted the importance of making BC safer and more inclusive for women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. As you form a new government, you have the opportunity to acknowledge the severity of gender-based violence and commit to preventing it. **Declaring gender-based violence an epidemic would be a monumental step toward recognizing it as a public health issue that warrants a significant and meaningful response.**

Gender-based violence is pervasive in our province, with nearly 30% of women experiencing physical or sexual intimate partner violence, according to Statistics Canada. That figure is much higher for Indigenous women in BC, reaching 42%. Even with those statistics, we know gender-based violence continues to be an underreported crime due to its complexity and stigma.

Across Canada, at least one woman or girl is killed every two days, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA). Even so, femicide—which the UN describes as an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation—is not part of Canada's criminal code. Data from CFOJA shows there were

21 femicides in BC in 2023. The year before that, 24 women were killed. But even one gender-motivated death is too many.

As service providers and advocates, we see firsthand just how many women, gender diverse people and their children experience violence. Many of our organizations have hundreds of women and children on our shelter and transition housing waitlists, as families fleeing violence search for a safe place to live. Support for the sector is more crucial than ever, and more action needs to be taken.

Declaring gender-based violence an epidemic will lead to increased public awareness, but more than that, it will demonstrate to survivors that your government recognizes the frequency and severity of the problem and is committed to taking steps towards its prevention.

Declaring gender-based violence an epidemic also acknowledges this critical issue requires a public health response. The negative effects of gender-based violence reach far beyond the individuals who directly experience them; it can have long-lasting and negative health, social and economic effects that span generations.

We know the provincial government has taken steps through Safe and Supported: BC's Gender-Based Violence Action Plan and by appointing Kim Stanton to review the treatment of sexual violence and intimate partner violence in the province's legal system. And nearly two years ago, Dr. Bonnie Henry identified eliminating gender-based violence as a "public health priority." It's now time to take that one step further.

To address the urgency of this issue, we ask that you include a declaration of gender-based violence as an epidemic in your upcoming ministry mandate letters. We know that governments and policymakers can have a lasting impact by choosing to invest in violence prevention, early intervention and survivor support services. As a coalition of advocates, experts and concerned service providers, we will present to your government additional recommendations for action to address gender-based violence.

We invite you to meet with us to discuss this issue in greater detail and to review the attached backgrounder.

By taking bold action today and declaring gender-based violence an epidemic, your government will demonstrate its commitment to improving the safety, health and overall well-being of women and gender-diverse people in our province. We urge you to make this vital commitment.

Sincerely,



Erin Seeley, CEO, YWCA Metro Vancouver

In collaboration with the following individuals and organizations:

Allison Mclauchlan, Executive Director, Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society

Amy S. FitzGerald, Executive Director, BC Society of Transition Houses

Ashley Oakes, Executive Director, PearlSpace

Chantelle Spicer, Campaign Manager, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Dalya Israel, Executive Director, Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre

Donne Rosa, CEO, Atira Women's Resource Society

Jessica L. Jimmo, Access BC

Jessie Kaur Lehal, Chapter Director, Shelter Movers – Vancouver and CEO, Kaur Collective Foundation

Karen Mason, Supporting Survivors of Abuse and Brain Injury Through Research (SOAR)

Katrina Chen, former BC MLA/Minister - now President of 安信 Community Savings and Author of A Stronger Home dedicated to raising awareness on family violence

Micki Materi, Co-Executive Director of Programs, Archway Society for Domestic Peace

Ninu Kang, Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC)

Rosa Elena Arteaga, Director, Clinical Practice and Direct Service at BWSS Battered Women's Support Services Association

Rowan Burdge, Executive Director, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Raji Mangat, Executive Director, West Coast LEAF

Sarah McIntosh, Chief Operating Officer, Atira Women's Resource Society

Sherry Demetrick, Co-Executive Director of Administration, Archway Society for Domestic Peace

Surrey Women's Centre

The Cridge Centre for the Family

The Moose Hide Campaign

Tracey Ramsey, Sybil Joseph and Brenda Mason, Unifor Women's Department and Unifor BC Regional Women's Committee

Vicky Bungay, PhD RN, FCAN, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Gender Equity and Community Engagement and Scientific Director: Capacity, the Centre for Research in Community Engagement and Gender Equity, University of British Columbia

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