



Monday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Premier's Office  
Room 281 Legislative Building,  
Queen's Park Toronto, ON  
M7A 1A1

By email: [premier@ontario.ca](mailto:premier@ontario.ca)

**RE: Bill 173 and Declaring Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic in Ontario**

Dear Premier Ford,

We are pleased by your government's recent support of Private Members' Bill 173, *The Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2024*. This Act requires the Government of Ontario to recognize that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an epidemic in Ontario. Representatives from the YWCA Ontario Coalition were in attendance on April 10<sup>th</sup> for the second reading of Bill 173 and we were grateful to be there alongside advocates, service providers, and survivors of IPV from across the province, all united against violence.

The YWCA Ontario Coalition comprises 10 Member Associations from across the province spanning Niagara Region to Sudbury, serving 45,000 women, girls, and gender diverse people annually. Our associations offer a range of programs and services designed to advance gender equity and address the needs of our communities, including affordable housing, emergency shelter, child care, employment and training, girls' programs and more.

We were pleased to see the Government of Ontario sign the Canada-Ontario bilateral agreement on the National Action Plan (NAP) to end Gender-Based Violence (GBV). We look forward to seeing the continued NAP rollout to ensure the \$162 million commitment supports survivors, the sector, and efforts to prevent further gender-based violence.

We are writing this letter because, as it stands now, Bill 173 passed second reading and has been referred to the Justice Policy Committee. While the Government has indicated its intent to have the Justice Committee tour the province and research the impacts of IPV, our hope is that you will **simultaneously begin implementing existing recommendations to address this**



**violence, including expediting Bill 173 through committee to third reading and royal assent.**

Since 2022, survivors, families impacted by IPV, advocates, and service providers have called for the implementation of the recommendations from the [Culleton, Kuzyk and Warmerdam Inquest Report](#), which included declaring IPV an epidemic. We hope the Justice Committee recognizes the urgency of this violence, and treats it as such, centering survivors, IPV experts, and advocates in their work, every step of the way.

There were [62 recorded femicides of women and children in Ontario from 2022 to 2023](#). We know that to end this violence we must address the root causes of it. YWCA Ontario would like to emphasize some specific considerations and recommendations from the [Culleton, Kuzyk, and Warmerdam Inquest Report](#) that, if addressed, could add "[some teeth](#)" to the declaration:

### **Existing Recommendations**

- **Funding** (*recommendations #18, 19, & 20*)

The need for adequate and stable funding for all organizations providing IPV support. This requires a significant financial investment and commitment from the Government to support organizations delivering these critical services. One specific area of funding support is for the establishment of an emergency fund to support people living with violence who are taking steps to seek safety. YWCAs across Ontario operate *December 6th Funds* to support low-barrier access to loans for those fleeing violence through: [The National Emergency Survivor Support \(NESS\) Fund](#).

Funds of this kind offer easy, low-barrier access for survivors seeking to improve their safety. People are often referred through service providers and are given interest free loans or grants of up to \$1300. Financial needs these funds assist in covering include rent and security deposits, essential furniture for new homes and utility set-up. Locally in 2023, YWCAs across Ontario provided 154 grants and distributed \$219,218.99 directly to survivors of gender-based violence with financial support for essential, immediate needs. Unfortunately, in 2023 the NESS fund had to decline 102 grants due to lack of funding and this does not include folks who may have tried to apply while the fund was closed,. There is an urgent need for more adequate funding.



- **IPV is more prominent in rural areas** (*recommendation #20*)

Women in rural areas experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence. We urge the Government to recognize that in remote and rural areas, funding cannot be per-capita equivalent to funding in urban settings as this does not take into account rural realities, including: the need to travel to access and provide services where telephone and internet coverage is not available; the lack of public transit; and, the cost of transportation for survivors and service providers.

- **Second-stage housing and transitional supports for IPV survivors** (*recommendation #21*)

The most dangerous time for a woman and her children experiencing violence is when she tries to leave her abuser. The YWCA Ontario Coalition supports women and their families fleeing violence to rebuild their confidence, recover from trauma and live meaningful lives through shelter, transitional, and affordable housing options. We need an increase in, and annualized, funding for supportive housing and wraparound services for women and children fleeing violence that includes:

- Deep investments in supportive housing solutions to address the gendered housing crisis in our province through dedicated funds for transitional and feminist housing, in order to support non-profit providers in maximizing federal and other investments.
- Funding for research-backed, trauma-informed wraparound programs for transitional and supportive housing. Without transitional and supportive housing programs, women and families who have left a violent situation may be faced with lengthy shelter stays or worse: be forced to return to dangerous homes.
- Recognizing gender-based violence and housing sector workers as not only essential and life-saving but also valuable professionals through increased funding, specifically for salaries and benefits.

- **Education and Training** (*recommendation #25*)

YWCA's across Ontario focus heavily on violence prevention, which is consistent with the [Inquest's recommendation](#) to use and build on existing age-appropriate education programs for primary and secondary schools and with the [NAP priority area of increasing prevention efforts](#).



At the core of YWCA girls' and youth programming is gender-based violence prevention. These programs teach youth about:

- healthy relationships and boundary setting
- understanding risk factors
- managing and processing feelings
- dispute resolution
- community and bystander obligations
- critical thinking skills

Violence prevention efforts are vital to working for futures free from violence. Despite this, there has never been provincial government funding tailored for violence prevention programs for girls and gender diverse youth.

YWCA's across the province recommend creating a \$30 million girls'-specific youth fund that women serving organizations – and other organizations with emerging and established girls' programs – can access to enable organizations to continue providing responsive and effective programs.

Premier Ford, as service providers, YWCA's across the province see the impacts of intimate partner and gender-based violence in our communities' first-hand. We know that supporting those fleeing violence means going beyond providing immediate shelter, but also wraparound trauma-informed supports, including *prevention* work.

We hope you will use your voice as Premier of Ontario to amplify YWCA Ontario's feedback. We do not want to see Bill 173 delayed; there are recommendations that exist and can be implemented immediately to address intimate partner violence. YWCA's across Ontario are experts in providing the support women and families need to rebuild their lives following violence and alongside your government, we are ready to support the advancement of Bill 173 and serve as an ongoing partner to eradicate IPV and ultimately, save lives.

Sincerely,

YWCA Ontario Coalition

CC: Hon. Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community & Social Services

Hon. Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity