



The Honorable Michael Kerzner
Ministry of the Solicitor General
George Drew Building, 18th Floor
25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Y6

March 16, 2023

Re: Province's response to Renfrew County Inquest Recommendations

Dear Minister Kerzner,

We are writing today as a concerned provincial coalition of YWCAs who serve more than 40,000 women, girls and gender diverse people across Ontario. Many of our organizations provide shelter and support services to survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). We mourn the women in our communities – both rural and urban – who are killed year after year in this devastating, preventable crime. We lost [52 women and girls](#) province-wide to femicide from November 2021-2022, nearly half at the hands of an intimate partner.

Last June, the verdict delivered in the Coroner's Inquest into the murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam in Renfrew County gave us a glimmer of hope that more women could be kept safe. [The 86 recommendations](#) provide a roadmap to preventing intimate partner violence from escalating to femicide. The verdict shone a light on the systemic underfunding of frontline supports and glaring gaps in the justice system. It called for bold changes that would reframe the public understanding of, and government response to, an insidious, often hidden experience.

The Province's [response to these recommendations](#) in February was a welcome addition to the conversation about how we can better support survivors of violence and prevent femicide. It was good to see nearly half of the 68 that fall under provincial jurisdiction addressed in the progress report released to the public. However, we feel that the province's response does not go far enough. As local advocates in Renfrew County have noted, the substantive and meaningful recommendations were listed as "requiring further analysis" and did not commit to any action. These include:

- Declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic
- Establishing an independent IPV Commission
- Creating a survivor advocate role within Ontario
- Immediately instituting a provincial implementation committee to oversee comprehensive consideration of all the recommendations.

As service providers and advocates in our communities, we stress the importance of having IPV be accurately and publicly acknowledged by the government for its prevalence and impact. [According to Statistics Canada](#), police-reported cases of family violence have been on the rise for the past five years; 79% of the victims in 2021 were women or girls. Despite growing public awareness, IPV continues to be an underreported crime on account of its complexity and stigma. It is still seen and treated as a private matter despite being shaped by countless systemic inequities. Black, racialized and Indigenous women and girls, who are at greater risk of harm, are far less likely to report this violence to the police. [Rural women](#) are at a higher risk of IPV and are more likely to be killed with a firearm. Declaring IPV as an epidemic would underscore the gravity of the violence women are facing and direct attention toward long overdue solutions.

We support the verdict's recommendations in full and call on the provincial government to take immediate action on the 29 it has listed as "requiring further analysis." In fact, the creation of an independent commission devoted to addressing the issue of IPV will help ensure transparency and accountability to advocate for preventative measures to keep intimate partner violence from escalating to murder. A survivor advocate role would support this function of accountability to drive the work forward and ensure this inquest does not simply become another inactive report but rather serves as a significant lever for change. Ahead of the year anniversary of the inquest in June, we urge you to strike a provincial implementation commission to ensure greater access to housing and financial support for those fleeing violence and also deeper support for men at risk of perpetrating femicide.

By taking action on the aforementioned recommendations, your government has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership that can save lives across this province and beyond jurisdictional borders. As experts in providing support and shelter for women, children and gender diverse people fleeing violence, we urge you to dig deeper ahead of the province's next set of responses in June and take more action to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence.

We are hopeful that together, we can create a world free of gender-based violence.

Sincerely,

YWCA Cambridge
YWCA Durham
YWCA Hamilton
YWCA Muskoka
YWCA Niagara Region
YWCA Peterborough-Haliburton
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
YWCA Sudbury
YWCA Toronto

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