

BILL C 391 WILL PROLONG RANDOM ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.

Pembroke Daily Observer, November 9, 2009

RE: Bill C 391, Private Member's bill to repeal the Long Gun Registry.

Dear Editor,

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) works toward the prevention and eradication of sexual assault. The Coalition recognizes that violence against women is one of the strongest indicators of prevailing societal attitudes towards women. OCRCC membership includes 23 of Ontario's sexual assault centres offering counselling, information and support services to survivors of sexual violence, including childhood sexual abuse and incest.

The Women's Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County is a member of the OCRCC.

We are writing regarding Bill C-391. As you are likely aware, Bill C-391, an Act to amend the Criminal Code and Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry), was introduced by Manitoba MP Candice Hooppner in May of 2009. It will receive second reading in the House of Commons Wednesday, November 4, 2009.

The purpose of the gun registry is to improve accountability to gun owners, prospective gun owners, and reduce gun-related crime.

The OCRCC is greatly concerned about the repealing of the gun registry: gun control figures prominently in both historical and current incidences of gendered violence in Canada. The Montreal Massacre, within which 14 women were murdered on December 6, 1989 by a misogynist gunman, was a major spur for the Canadian gun control movement - yet this fact has been totally absent from the current political deliberation of the issue. Survivor Heidi Rathjen, who was in one of the classrooms the gunman did not enter during the shooting, organized the Coalition for Gun Control with friend Wendy Cukier. Their activities, along with others, led to the passage of Bill C-68, or the Firearms Act, in 1995, ushering in stricter gun control regulations.

The 1995 regulations included new requirements on the training of gun owners, screening of firearm applicants, new rules concerning gun and ammunition storage and the registration of all firearms.

Gun registration continues to be significant to the issue of gender-based violence today. The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee found that "access to or possession of firearms" was present in 47% of domestic homicides in 2007, as a factor shown to have increased the risk of lethality to a woman. In the past six years, "Access and Control of Firearms" has been cited repeatedly as one recommendation out of many, aimed at preventing domestic homicides.

The Conservative Party has criticized the gun registry for its cost, ineffectiveness at preventing gun-related crimes, and red tape created for gun owners. OCRCC and many others disagree: in a Canada Firearms Centre survey, 92% of general duty police officers stated that they use the information in the registry, and 74% stated that the registry "query results have proven beneficial during major operations".

The OCRCC acknowledges the financial cost of the registry. We feel that addressing violence against women is indeed a financial investment, however one worth taking.

November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month: repealing the gun registry would be a step backwards when it comes to preventing violence against women!

On November 4, 2009, we ask that MPs send the message to all Ontarians that they believe that women and girls - and their safety from gun violence - are important. Vote no to Bill C 391, Private Member's bill to repeal the Long Gun Registry.

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres believes that the best way to prevent such incidences is to work with others to change a society that presently condones forms of violence against women. Together, we will make a difference.

Sincerely,

Nicole Pietsch
OCRCC Coordinator

JoAnne Brooks
Women's Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County