

March 12, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

Re: Do not dismantle gun control. Defeat Bill C-301 on April 1, 2009

Dear Sir,

The signatories to this letter are deeply concerned about Conservative MP Garry Breitkreuz's Private Member Bill C-301, which will **relax controls on restricted and prohibited guns (including handguns, assault weapons and machine guns) as well as eliminate the registration of rifles and shotguns**. Please ensure your party defeats this proposed legislation at second reading on April 1, 2009.

You have stated your commitment to ending violence against women, most recently in the letter many of us received on December 6th 2008. Our gun law is not only a monument to those who were killed on December 6, 1989 at l'École Polytechnique, but is recognized worldwide as an effective tool for reducing gun violence targeting women. Commitment to ending violence against women requires more than wearing a white ribbon on December 6th. As the 20th anniversary of the Montreal massacre approaches, it would be a travesty if the party you lead helps dismantle the gun law we all worked so hard to pass.

Our laws have made Canada safer.

- In 1991, more than 1400 Canadians were killed with guns. Now it is fewer than 800.
- The 2007 rate of murders with rifles and shotguns has dropped by more than 78% from 1991.
- Murders of women with guns have plummeted from 85 in 1991 to 32 in 2004 (the numbers of murders without guns have not dropped as significantly).
- Suicide rates, particularly among youth, have also declined.

Policing, public health and victims' organizations across Canada – including those from Polytechnique and Dawson College - support sensible gun control. On behalf of millions of women in Canada, so do we. As the Alberta Court of Appeal noted, gun control is a women's issue: women represent a small percentage of Canada's 2 million gun owners. But they account for a high percentage of the victims of gun violence.

Mandatory screening, licensing and renewal for all firearm owners as well as registration of all firearms are important measures for protecting the safety of women. Renewable licenses reduce the risk that individuals with a history of domestic violence will have access to firearms. Registration ensures that the police can take preventative action. **The proposed law extends the licensing period for 10 years for all gun owners (including those who own handguns and assault weapons), reducing the opportunities for review and ensuring that information is up to date.** Canada's licensing system, with spousal renewal, is essential for the safety of women. Do not help undermine it and jeopardize our safety and the safety of our children.

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Rifles and shotguns are the firearms most often used to kill women and children in domestic violence. Access to a firearm is the fifth leading predictor of female homicide in domestic violence. **The proposed law also eliminates the requirement to register rifles and shotguns.** The Supreme Court underscored the importance of registration as a means of enforcing the licensing provisions of the law. If a licensed owner can buy as many guns as they want without having their name associated with the guns through the registry, there is little to prevent them from giving those guns to individuals *without* licenses. Information about the guns individuals own is essential to enforcing prohibition orders and **supporting preventative action by Canada's police agencies**; they currently use the registry *9400 times* per day. There are many powerful semi-automatic firearms currently classified as unrestricted firearms, including the Ruger Mini-14 used at Polytechnique. Repeatedly, inquests into the murders of women and children recommended the licensing of gun owners and registration of guns to prevent further tragedies.

There is no place for military and tactical weapons in the hands of civilians. Almost 400,000 Canadians signed a petition calling for a ban on these weapons and most countries in the world prohibit civilian possession of fully automatic and semi automatic weapons. The shooting at Dawson college taught us a bitter lesson – that the lists of prohibited firearms have not been updated since the law passed in 1995. We want more control on these weapons, **not less**. Bill C-301 relaxes controls allowing fully automatic weapons to be taken to shooting ranges.

Canadian women continue to support overwhelmingly the licensing of gun owners and registration of all firearms. Polls have shown that while half of gun owners opposed the law, **77% of people living with a gun owner supported it.** Women are rightly concerned about access to rifles and shotguns in cases of domestic violence and suicide:

- 88% of Canadian women killed with guns are killed with a shotgun or rifle, the very guns that opponents of the law say are not the cause of gun violence;
- Access to guns is the fifth highest of 18 risk factors in spousal homicides;
- 50% of family homicides end in the suicide of the murderer, indicating that the key to protecting women and children is thorough screening in licensing and licence renewals for gun owners;
- When guns are used there are more likely to be multiple victims, often children;
- Although opposition to gun control is stronger where rates of gun ownership are higher (particularly in rural and western communities), women and children are particularly at risk from guns in the home in these areas.

Let us be clear: the stakes could not be higher for Canadian women. Ending violence against women requires more than talk. It requires action. We urge you to lead your party to reduce violence and suicide in our families and our communities, by **defeating Bill C-301 on April 1.**

Signatories listed on attached page.

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Signing in opposition to Bill C301:

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