

**YWCA Toronto submission to the Standing
Committee on Public Safety and National
Security
on Bill C-391, An Act to amend the *Criminal Code*
and the *Firearms Act* (repeal of long-gun
registry)**

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I. YWCA Toronto

YWCA Toronto is the city's trusted multi-service organization by, for and about women and girls. YWCA Toronto is a turning point for women who are escaping violence and rebuilding healthy lives. We offer a range of housing options, employment and skills development and girls' and family programs. Last year YWCA Toronto served more than 26,000 people in Toronto.

II. Introduction

YWCA Toronto, like scores of other women's organizations as well as individuals and groups concerned about public safety, is strongly opposed to Bill C-391, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry)*.

YWCA Toronto is urging Committee members to consider the evidence and exercise the necessary leadership to protect public safety.

In short, the gun registry, which is accessed 11,000 times a day by law enforcement officers, has saved lives and made Canada safer.

While some argue that the registry is too onerous and criminalizes gun owners, YWCA Toronto insists such baseless arguments must be countered by concerned Canadians and elected officials.

As Alberta Chief Justice Fraser put it, "[Canada's gun control law] is about the protection of public safety from the misuse of ordinary firearms. This is to be accomplished through a simple but compelling concept - individual responsibility and accountability for one's ordinary firearms. This is a small price to pay for the privilege of being allowed to possess and use a dangerous weapon¹."

Alberta Chief Justice Fraser also agreed that gun control is a gender issue. She wrote: "...increased firearms controls are also consistent with the philosophy underlying the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*....Parliament's efforts with Bill C-68 were motivated, in part, by the desire to reduce the incidence of firearms-related domestic violence. This

¹Chief Justice Catherine Fraser. Alberta Court of Appeal. Decision. October, 1998.

being so, one should not ignore the international human rights context."²

Limiting access to potentially lethal weapons assists in a global approach to eliminating violence against women and family violence. Access to firearms is one of the top five risk factors associated with domestic murders of women in Ontario.³ In every community, including in Toronto, when guns are readily accessible, they become the vehicle for expressing violence.

YWCA Toronto appreciates that in rural communities, where hunting is common, guns play a different role in the culture than in urban communities. That said, YWCA Toronto asserts that most Canadians would agree that it is in our shared interest to promote a culture of public and private safety, and indeed, that safety concerns should trump misplaced concerns about criminalizing law-abiding gun owners.

III. The Gun Registry is effective

The most compelling reason to maintain the registry of long guns and rifles is that it has made Canada safer and has saved lives. Since Canada strengthened controls on all types of firearms, injuries and deaths have decreased.

In 1995, 1,125 people in Canada were killed with guns. Now it is fewer than 800,⁴. In terms of the use of long-guns, the 2008 rate of murders with rifles and shotguns has dropped by 52 percent from 1995.⁵ Suicide rates, particularly among youth, have also declined.

Registration of all firearms ensures accountability and encourages safe storage which in turn can eliminate many impulsive domestic homicides. It allows police to confiscate all firearms from abusive partners and enables prohibition orders to be enforced. Without accurate knowledge of how many firearms are owned, the police cannot take those preventive measures.

² Ibid.

³ Ontario Office of the Chief Coroner (2002), *The Toronto Star*, 1 April 2004, p. A8.

⁴ Kwing Hung, "Firearms Statistics Updated Tables," January 2006; Statistics Canada, "Mortality, Summary List of Causes", 2000-2005.

⁵ Kwing Hung, "Firearms Statistics Updated Tables," January 2006; Sarah Beatty, "Homicide in Canada, 2008," *Statistics Canada Juristat* Vol. 29, no.4, October 2009.

Until 2000, firearms were the weapons most frequently used in the commission of spousal homicides, accounting for the death of one in three victims. While firearms were used in approximately 40 percent of femicide in 1989, they now account for less than 15 percent.⁶

IV. The Gun Registry is well-used

In 2009, the gun registry was accessed an average of 11,085 times a day by law enforcement officers.⁷ Surely we can agree that our law enforcement officers would not be accessing useless information 11,000 times a day. Indeed, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, experts in public safety by any measure, have expressed their support for the gun registry as a useful tool in law enforcement and maintaining public safety.

In 2008, there were 254,036 individuals prohibited from possessing firearms in Canada. In many of these cases, the prohibition orders are issued following violent behavior. Registration of all types of firearms helps prevent people with a record of violence from easily obtaining a firearm and allows police to enforce these prohibition orders, thereby contributing to the protection and safety of women who are threatened with guns.

V. The Gun Registry is better managed

No one is likely to argue that the establishment of the gun registry was well-managed. However, in 2006 the Auditor General of Canada reported that earlier recommendations to improve the financial management of the Canadian Firearms Program had, for the most part, been satisfactorily implemented.

Eliminating the long-gun registry would not save what some have claimed is billions of dollars annually. Rather, as the RCMP reported, approximately \$3 million would be saved annually if the registry was eliminated.⁸

⁶ Kwing Hung, "Firearms Statistics: Updated Tables," Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice: Research and Statistics Division, January 2005; Statistics Canada, "Mortality, Summary List of Causes", 2005.

⁷ www.rcmp.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm

⁸ RCMP Deputy Commissioner Peter Martin testimony to the Government Operations and Estimates Committee, November, 2006.

YWCA Toronto thinks investing in public safety is a good use of public dollars.

VI. Conclusion

Canadians know all too well that violence against women sometimes involves the use or threat of firearms. YWCA Toronto insists that it is critical that all possible measures be taken to end violence against women; one such measure is legislating gun control.

The long-gun registry is effective, well-used and a reasonable use of public dollars. In the opinion of YWCA Toronto, the Committee has an impossible job. It does not appear to us that Bill C-391 can be sufficiently amended to both protect public safety and maintain the spirit of the bill. Repealing the re