



Coalition of
Provincial & Territorial
Advisory Councils on the
Status of Women

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Briefing Note on Bill C-391

I am here today on behalf of the Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women. This national group consists of provincial advisory councils from across the country dedicated to advancing women's issues within their individual provinces, but who come together in the interest of women on a national level. Today, we are gravely concerned that the Canadian Government is considering passing Bill C-391 and implementing the abolishment of the existing long-gun registry. The international community has identified gun control as a means of monitoring one significant area of domestic violence. In Canada, the Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women supports that point of view and implores Members of Parliament to reject Bill C-391 and maintain a control over this particular source of domestic violence and public safety.

Firearms are frequently the weapon of choice for intimidation and violence against women and children and in domestic homicides. Firearms are also valuable weapons for both Canadian men and women who are hunters, law enforcement officers and citizens who depend on firearms to provide for their families. We do not want to see the complete abolishment of firearms and do recognize the current registration system is not without faults; however the long-gun registry is an essential tool in protecting all Canadians. If passed, Bill C-391 will see the total abolishment of the existing long-gun registry, which has proven invaluable as long-gun murders have decreased by 70% since its inception.¹

It is important for all Canadians to understand this registry and its function. Although not a perfect system in its current state, there are many indicators to support the value of the long-gun registry. Studies have shown women who experience domestic violence feel further threatened and intimidated by the presence of firearms in their households. A study conducted between 2005 and 2007 on rural domestic violence explored firearms as a tool of violence and intimidation.² This case study based on evidence from rural New Brunswick and

¹ Canadian Labour Congress Bill C-391 (repeal of long-gun registry) Legislative Action Activist Book

² Exploring the Links: Firearms, Family Violence and Animal Abuse in Rural Communities EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, <http://www.unbf.ca/arts/CFVR/documents/FirearmsFamilyviolenceexecutivesummary.pdf>, Doherty, D. & Hornosty, J.

Prince Edward Island showed that 66% of women interviewed indicated that having a firearm in their home made them fearful for their safety.³ Even more alarming, on a national scale, one in three women in Canada murdered by their husbands is killed by a firearm.⁴ Such statistics show that both physical and psychological harm reinforce the ongoing need for national long-gun control.

From a law-enforcement perspective, the existing long-gun registry is supported by the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Canadian Association of Police Boards. Last year, this registry was used by law-enforcement officers approximately 11,000 times a day across Canada.⁵ Having a system in place which allows law enforcement agencies to conduct background checks is an invaluable tool particularly when statistics indicate that possession or access to firearms is among the top five risk factors in domestic violence.⁶

Not only does the registry assist law-enforcement agencies, but it also protects Canadian firearm owners by creating a system which will identify lost or stolen guns. This is particularly important in instances where firearms are used in illegal activity. For example, where an owner reports a firearm stolen, that individual can be absolved of any charges made in relation to the subsequent illegal use of that stolen firearm. More generally, the registry assists in the recovery of firearms funnelled into the illegal market. Again, this system is a way of protecting long-gun owners who register their firearms.

On an international scale, organizations such as the United Nations, advocate for global firearm regulations as a means of reducing the risk of violence against women.⁷ By abolishing the existing long-gun registry, Canada is directly at odds with a goal of the global community.

While there are criticisms that the current registration process is onerous, the long-gun registry does not prevent Canadians from owning a firearm and amendments to the current law would be a more appropriate resolution rather than a complete abolishment of the registry.

Many people are confused about the licensing and registration processes, and do not understand their distinct values and functions. Licensing monitors firearm applicants by conducting background checks. Once a license is granted and a long-gun is acquired, the firearm must then be registered. The purpose of the registry is to ensure that gun owners are accountable for their firearm; therefore reducing the number of legal guns used in illegal manners. There is no additional

³ Ibid.

⁴ Coalition for Gun Control, <http://www.guncontrol.ca/English/Home/Home.htm>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

fee imposed on gun owners to register their long gun. This dual process was reinforced by the Supreme Court of Canada in Reference re *Firearms Act*. The Court stated “the registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the *Firearms Act* are both tightly linked to Parliament’s goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.”⁸

The registry is also criticized as being too expensive. If Bill C-391 is passed, however, all the financial and human resources which have gone into creating and maintaining this system will be lost. To put these financial criticisms in perspective, the health care costs associated in treating victims of firearm injury far outweigh the annual expenditures to maintain the long-gun registry.⁹

Given the disproportionately high number of long-gun owners in rural communities, some critics reduce this issue to an urban versus rural debate. While long-gun possession is more prevalent in rural areas, so is the number of homicides involving long guns.¹⁰ Specifically, the RCMP report that 71% of spousal homicides involve rifles and shotguns and is the most common type of firearm used in the spousal homicides.¹¹

The Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women hears the plea to maintain the long-gun registry. There is no denying that since its inception, there has been a significant decrease in the number of women murdered by firearms, falling from 85 in 1991 to 32 in 2004.¹² Gun control is very much a women’s issue, but it is also very much society’s issue. It is important to remember why the long-gun registry was initially created, and it is through amendment of the existing system that a balance may be reached for all Canadians.

⁸ Reference re *Firearms Act* (Can.), [2000] 1 S.C.R. 783.

⁹ Canadian Labour Congress Bill C-391 (repeal of long-gun registry) Legislative Action Activist Book

¹⁰Francisco, Jocelyn & Christian Chenier, “A Comparison of Large Urban, Small Urban and Rural Crime Rates, 2005”, Juristat Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Statistics Canada- Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol. 27, no. 3)

¹¹ “Research Summary: Domestic Violence Involving Firearms”, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/res-rec/violence-eng.htm>

¹² Canadian Labour Congress Bill C-391 (repeal of long-gun registry) Legislative Action Activist Book