



Deputation to the Executive Committee

Re: 2018.MM44.14, Creating an Intersectional Gender Equity Strategy and Gender Equality Office for Toronto

September 18<sup>th</sup> 2019

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**In support of creating a Gender Equity Strategy and Gender Equality Office for Toronto**

Good Morning. My name is Harmy Mendoza and I am the Executive Director of the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT). Our mission is to eradicate violence against women and advance gender equity through coordination, education, research and policy. We convene and mobilize communities across Toronto to drive system change for women and we have been doing this for 28 years.

I would like to dedicate my deputation to the 148 women and girls killed in 2018 across Canada, 21 of whom lived in Toronto. To the 60 women and girls killed in 2019 across Canada. To Tharshika Jeganathan, killed by her former husband on Wednesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Toronto.

I am here this morning to emphasize and speak to the need for a Gender Equity Strategy and Gender Equality Office for Toronto.

While we commend the City of Toronto for undertaking initiatives such as the gender equity tool or applying a gender analysis to strategies such as the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy and HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan, we know there is more to do. We know that in order to reduce inequities faced by women, girls, trans and non-binary people across the city, we need to apply an intersectional gender framework and gender-responsive budgeting process to all policy and programmatic areas.

Gender inequities still persist in Toronto. Women, girls, trans and non-binary individuals face higher rates of violence and continue to be murdered by their partners and ex-partners at a substantially higher rate than men. Women are more likely to be unemployed, in precarious work and still make less money than their male counterparts. And yet, they make up 52% of the population. The experience of being a Torontonians is indeed gendered and these experiences are further impacted by race, immigration status, disability, sexuality and socio-economic status.

When we speak to women experiencing violence in Toronto, we hear what these inequalities translate into. Women are unable to live free from violence because of a lack of access to money and housing. Women tell us that they face discrimination by landlords because they are on social assistance or are lone

parents, even though we know that 84% of lone-parent families in Toronto are led by women. Women report that they struggle to access employment, childcare, and public services because of a lack of access to transit, even though we know that 59% of public transit users in Toronto are women. Women also tell us that there is still an expectation that they must leave the home and have their lives disrupted when they are experiencing abuse, rather than the perpetrator leaving. This is an expectation that is still reinforced by policy, programs and practices across the city. These experiences are just a few reasons why we need strategies and budgets that take into account the needs of women as well as work to close the gender gap.

Despite a long history of women's policy advocacy, the idea that women's interests should be incorporated into the policy process is still relatively new. From our experience, integrating an intersectional gender analysis to policies, services and programs requires dedicated time, resources, capacity building, constant community engagement as well as a willingness for change. We believe that a city-wide Gender Equity Strategy and Gender Equality Office would meet these needs.

We would also like to emphasize that this work does not have to happen alone. Women's advocates and organizations across the city have a long history of this work and we know that our communities are keen and waiting to share their expertise, tools and strategies for achieving gender-responsive policy and budgets. We also encourage the Gender Equality Office to closely engage the community in driving priorities.

WomanACT regularly engages community agencies and women across the city to identify needs and develop policy, program and practice solutions. We find that when communities are engaged in the decision-making that affects their everyday lives, they feel more valued in their community and are more motivated to build safe, cohesive and healthy communities.

In conclusion, the stakes are incredibly high and this isn't rocket science. We have solutions to closing the gender gap and this is one of them. We hope that the City of Toronto will demonstrate its commitment to women's safety and gender equality.