

March 7, 2022

## **INTIMATE PARTNER AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CANADA**

I write to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women so they may consider the effects of domestic violence I've witnessed in Canada.

I am fifth generation Canadian and truly hoped that domestic violence had diminished in our country. However, I've noticed that younger generations of women today are being treated as badly or maybe worse than before, especially by our judicial system. As a grandmother I look forward to the hopes of Canada becoming judicially fair before my granddaughters become adults.

The **public are unaware that Family Court judges, mediators and arbitrators are often inexperienced in family law**, yet parents are putting so much faith and trust in their hands. Anyone with this much authority should definitely have experience, knowledge, expertise and be interested in the true best interests of families. Canadians have a right to know who is making such life decisions.

I'm proud to say my generation fought for equality for women but how much was gained? Women, by nature are nurturers and men take pride in being providers. Therefore, when starting a family, women tend to support their mate's career while putting their own careers on hold, allowing the family to focus first and foremost on the children. Of course, this limits women's incomes while promoting men's but puts women at risk. They're now financially dependent and that's fine in a happy marriage. However, marriages now fail 50% of the time.

I know of many women from close personal relationships who have suffered from domestic violence and separation, divorce and court proceedings. I mention only two below because their stories are all too common. I'd be happy to discuss more with you if it would help women and children.

### **SCENARIO #1**

After 16 years of marriage, this woman had no control of finances. Her husband's telephone dinged every time she made a purchase or even bought a coffee on her debit card because she wasn't allowed to carry cash. Think of the repercussions to her mental health as well as the loss of self-respect. Children are being abused every time they witness any form of abuse to their mothers. This scenario shows financial, verbal abuse and coercive control that three children witnessed daily. This woman was forced to accept a terrible financial settlement at separation because her financial situation left her no strength to stand up to a bully husband. Meanwhile, her husband left as soon as he inherited wealth.

Women not only suffer from physical and financial abuse but also suffer from coercive control. Too many women are being gas lighted into thinking they're less than they really are because they start to believe their narcissistic partners. If one is told something often enough, they begin to believe it.

### **SCENARIO #2**

This next scenario is a very close relationship I have with another woman who went through in vitro fertilization (IVF) at the request of her husband and was then blindsided with a request for divorce at 20 weeks of pregnancy. We don't know the effect on the unborn child who went through the trauma of this divorce. What I do know is that this woman and her unborn baby had to attend hospital several times due to the emotional stress regarding her situation and the health of her baby. The father agreed to give the mother

sole custody, stating “I will be as involved or as uninvolved as you wish”. However, after two years of minimum involvement and interest, the father and his new partner initiated a court proceeding demanding custody and 50/50 access.

Lawyers advised that ‘high conflict’ divorce cases are always subject to ‘parental alienation’ and in the majority of cases, judges will rule against the person who fights against access. Mothers are being advised to avoid reaching out to judicators to protect their children for fear of risking loss of parenting time.

In this case, the woman suffered immense physical and emotional pain throughout her pregnancy while her husband was uninterested in her and his unborn child. Imagine the woman’s frustration and mental anguish! Now imagine the mental stability of a 3 year old child who has never lived with or known the other parent or known another house she now has to call home on weekends. This child suffered the part time loss of the only parent she ever knew and began to worry about the days of the week at this young age. Do you think this is in the child’s best interests?

In both scenarios and many others I know, women are too afraid to speak out or seek help because the risk is too great. Instead, they constantly put out fires, walk on eggshells and live in fear.

Women and their children ultimately pay too much for this breakdown in protective services and our court system. Children are being ordered daily by Canadian courts to live in dysfunctional/abusive homes, which can perpetuate cycles of domestic violence.

The pain inflicted on these women and children could be lessened and even avoided if Family Court Judges and their counterparts (i.e. Lawyers, Mediators, Child Psychologist Assessors, etcetera) could be educated and trained in domestic violence of all types. This education/training should be extensive because even psychiatrists have a difficult time in diagnosing narcissists and other personality disorders. Men who exhibit coercive control, abusive behaviours and/or narcissistic tendencies are expert manipulators. Yet our Family Court Judges are sending our next generation to live with this abuse.

Courts are not taking the child’s best interest or their personal choices into account by sending children back and forth to live with a parent who is abusive, selfish, scary or dysfunctional. This is unacceptable and change should happen immediately.

We must save these children. Let’s face it - too many children are being abused and in way too many cases, murdered because the warning signs are ignored. Preventative steps are non-existent for women to avoid these battles. Our Canadian Family Courts should be held responsible.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Please recommend Bill C-233** so all Family Court decision makers will become more knowledgeable in ALL forms of domestic violence against women and children. Give Canadians higher standards for upcoming generations and actually start putting CHILDREN’S BEST INTERESTS forward.
2. Judges and anyone making decisions with respect to society should have expertise in Family Law. I recommend **that judges, arbitrators and mediators should have at least 5 years of experience working in this field of law before given authority to make life altering decisions.**
3. **Abolish parental alienation language within the court system.** This was a theory put in place for men with a purpose to deny women the right to protect their children.

4. Rather than trying to appease the adults in these separated homes, please **really look to the best interests of the child**. Listen to their little voices and adhere to their human rights. These children shouldn't be forced to live out of suitcases. Children should want to visit their parent and their love must be earned.