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May 14, 2024

Honourable Minister Jeremy Cockrill
Room 361, 2405 Legislative Drive,
Regina, SK, S4S 0B3

Dear Minister Cockrill,

The Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS) is the member association for 25 agencies that provide emergency and second-stage shelter and counseling services to survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Saskatchewan. We support our members through research, training, and providing opportunities for peer support. We strive to create safer communities by working with community agencies and government and by providing public education on the issue of intimate partner and family violence. PATHS' work has included research on the impact of IPV on Saskatchewan workers, advocating for legislation such as workplace leave for IPV survivors, and participation in the Clare's Law Multisector Review Committee and the Saskatchewan Domestic Violence Death Review.

Our member agencies have expressed concern that they have been unable to provide information in schools on healthy relationships due to the current ban on third-party presenters. For that reason, I was pleased to see that there is a plan to develop a framework for once again allowing third-party organizations to enter Saskatchewan schools to deliver much-needed information. However, I was disappointed to read that this framework could take up to a year to develop. As I am sure you are aware, Saskatchewan has the highest per capita rate of police-reported IPV among the provinces in Canada.

Statistics Canada has reported that in 2022 Saskatchewan had both the highest rate of police-reported IPV (732 victims per 100,000 population) and police-reported family violence (730 victims per 100,000 population) which frequently includes child victims. These rates are significantly higher than those of the second-highest ranked province, Manitoba at 633 IPV incidents reported per 100,000 and 585 family violence incidents per 100,000.¹ Even so, the number of reported incidents is likely the tip of the iceberg as the majority of these incidents go unreported.

It is likely no surprise that almost eight out of ten reported incidents of IPV are against women and girls. Still, perhaps you will find it surprising that reported IPV was nearly seven times higher among women and girls aged 12 to 24 years (776 victims per 100,000 population). Across Canada, there were 24,136 children and youth (aged 17 years and younger) who were victims of police-reported family violence in 2022, representing a rate of 334 victims per 100,000 population. This rate of victimization has increased steadily since 2009.² In the Statistics Canada article that reports these figures, they state, "Younger victims are unique in that they may be unaware that they are being victimized, may not

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.htm>

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231121/t002b-eng.htm>

know how to seek help, may be unable to report their victimization and may be dependent on the perpetrator.”³

This is the crux of the matter and the cause for concern by PATHS and others who wish to protect children and youth from harm. Children learn what they live. In Saskatchewan, children are growing up in homes where violence and abuse are taking place. Even when directed at a parent, this causes significant harm to children. Under the Saskatchewan *Child and Family Services Act*, exposure to domestic violence or severe domestic disharmony is considered child abuse. Additionally, there is research that shows that children who are exposed to IPV in their homes are at increased risk of neglect, and of physical and sexual abuse.⁴ In their position paper on this topic, The Canadian Pediatric Society states, “The identification of children and youth who have been exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) can be challenging due to the non-specific behaviours sometimes associated with such exposure, and the stigma and secrecy that often characterize IPV.”

The first and second stated goals of Saskatchewan’s Child Abuse Protocol are:

- 1. encourage multi-disciplinary, collaborative, adaptive and responsive partnerships among all professionals to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children;*
- 2. improve co-operation among professionals and agencies towards a common goal of improved management of child abuse cases;*

It appears that the decision to bar all third-party presenters in Saskatchewan schools based on one unfortunate incident contradicts the goals stated above. While we at PATHS applaud the recent announcements of funding and programs designed to address violence and abuse in our province, the impact of those campaigns, programs, and services will be counteracted by the impact of letting yet another generation of school children grow up believing that violence and abuse are normal.

In 2016, PATHS conducted a survey of Saskatchewan workers and asked at the beginning of the survey if respondents had experienced IPV, 46% said yes, 48% said no, and 6% said that they were not sure. Yet, when asked to respond to a list of abusive behaviours, 283 respondents (64.76% of 437) reported that they had experienced some form of abuse from a partner demonstrating that even adults in Saskatchewan do not have a full understanding of the dynamics of abuse.⁵

I am often asked why Saskatchewan consistently has the highest rate of police-reported violence among the provinces. Though some geographic and demographic conditions contribute to this, it is what we do not do that often comes to mind. We don’t have a provincial action plan to address IPV that includes timelines, goals and outcome measures. In fact, Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada that lacks such a plan. We don’t have a round table that includes GBV sector staff, survivors, and relevant government ministries that would allow for the exchange of information, research, and best practices. Our social assistance and minimum wage rates are such that women are often faced with the choice of living in poverty or living with abuse. Our shelters are turning away hundreds of women and children each year due to a lack of available beds. There is a shortage of safe and affordable housing compounded by the fact that the SIS program has made private market landlords unwilling to rent to

³<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231121/dq231121b-eng.htm>

⁴ <https://cps.ca/en/documents/authors-auteurs/child-and-youth-maltreatment-section>

⁵ <https://pathssk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PATHS-IPV-Workplace-Report-2018.pdf>

individuals on SIS. PATHS member agencies would like to do more work on violence prevention, but this work is not funded.

Perhaps Justice Richard Danyliuk summed up the most salient point when he said, “Saskatchewan — my home province, a place that I love — is a national leader in the incidents of domestic and intimate partner violence. What an absolute tragedy. How shameful,” Danyliuk said. “In Saskatchewan, the hard, but simple fact, is that men like to strike women. Saskatchewan men are leaders in Canada in solving their relationship problems through the use violence. It is disgusting, it has to stop.”⁶

What we desperately need in Saskatchewan is a culture shift, a shift that needs to start with young people in schools so they can be reached before they start experiencing or perpetrating IPV as young as age 12. There are excellent programs that are currently being implemented in two provinces that have low per capita rates of IPV, B.C.⁷ and Ontario⁸, that could be implemented here as well. We need all of society to stand up, as Justice Danyliuk did, and say that abuse is not ok. We need cooperation and collaboration. We need leadership. This government has an opportunity to be the government that turns around our long-standing position as a leader in all forms of interpersonal violence and abuse. Will you take it?

We at PATHS and our 25 member agencies would like nothing more than to work with your government to identify and implement solutions. There is no quick or easy fix to this issue but there is currently a framework developed by experts⁹ across Canada that brings together the many threads that impact vulnerability to experiencing and perpetrating IPV and family violence. Using this framework and the funding provided by the federal government under the national action plan and working in cooperation with the agencies who are dedicated to this we can make a difference.

Sincerely,



Jo-Anne Dusel, Executive Director
Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS)

cc- Honourable Laura Ross
cc- Honourable Browen Erye
cc- Matt Love
cc- Jennifer Bowes
cc- Nicole Sauer

⁶ <https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/men-like-to-strike-women-judge-slams-culture-of-domestic-violence-in-sask-during-murder-sentencing-1.6433155>

⁷ <https://bcsth.ca/program/vip/>

⁸ <https://youthrelationships.org/>

⁹ <https://nationalactionplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NAP-Final-Report.pdf>