

LEAF, AVALON CENTRE, AND WELLNESS WITHIN TO BRING IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, GENDER EQUALITY TO NOVA SCOTIA'S MASS CASUALTY COMMISSION

May 13, 2021 –The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, and Wellness Within will jointly bring their expertise on gender-based violence and gender equality to the Mass Casualty Commission's investigation into the tragic events of April 18-19, 2020.

Today, the Mass Casualty Commission granted the applications of LEAF, Avalon Centre, and Wellness Within for participation in the Commission's work. This means that these organizations will be able to bring their voices to Commission proceedings, and help inform the Commission's recommendations to prevent future violence.

"It will be critical for the Commission to examine the relationship between the horrific events of April 2020 and intimate partner violence," said Pam Hrick, Executive Director & General Counsel of LEAF. "LEAF will be there alongside Avalon Centre and Wellness Within to support the Commission's work, and to ensure that its recommendations respond to the harms of gender-based violence in this case and more broadly."

The mass casualty event has a strong link to gender-based violence. The killer allegedly first abused his female partner, before killing 22 people. Gender-based violence has also played a role in other mass killings, including the 2014 murders of six people in California by a self-described "incel".

More broadly, women, girls, and gender-diverse people continue to experience a disproportionate level of violence in Canada. According to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice, 160 women and girls were killed in Canada in 2020. That represents one woman or girl every two-and-a-half days.

LEAF, Avalon Centre, and Wellness Within support the Commission's mandate to examine the role of intimate partner and gender-based violence in this mass casualty event. While the Commission carries out its work, LEAF, Avalon Centre, and Wellness Within call on federal, provincial, and territorial governments to develop and implement a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence. Governments must also prioritize the implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which have thus far gone unanswered.

"It is well past time to end gender-based violence in this country," said Martha Paynter, Chair of Wellness Within. "Wellness Within is honoured to participate in the Commission's important work in coalition with LEAF and Avalon Centre while continuing to call for government action to eradicate gender-based violence throughout Canada."

"We are grateful that the Commission has recognized the long-standing contributions of feminist and anti-violence organizations to address and respond to misogyny and gender-based violence," said Jackie Stevens, Executive Director of Avalon Sexual Assault Centre. "We look forward to this collaboration with LEAF and Wellness Within. Our communities expect and deserve more effective responses to these incidents, as we work together to eliminate Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence."

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About the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)

The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) is a national not-for-profit that works to advance gender equality in Canada through litigation, education and public law reform.

Since 1985, LEAF has intervened in more than 100 cases that have helped shape the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, prevented violence against women and gender diverse people, eliminated discrimination in the workplace, allowed access to reproductive freedoms, and provided improved maternity benefits, spousal support, and the right to pay equity.

LEAF understands that women and gender diverse individuals in Canada experience discrimination in different ways, and builds partnerships across communities to inform our understanding of how race, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, class, and other intersectional identities underlie legal structures that perpetuate inequality, discrimination, and harm.

About Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

Avalon Centre aspires to a world in which individuals are empowered and mobilized to share responsibility in creating communities free from sexualized violence and abuse. Avalon Centre provides a leadership role in raising awareness, supporting those who have experienced sexualized violence, and influencing social and systemic change.

Using an intersectional feminist lens to analyze and respond to sexualized violence/abuse and other forms of violence and oppression, Avalon Centre offers a continuum of specialized services, with an emphasis on support, counselling, education, immediate medical care, forensic evaluation, leadership, and advocacy. Our services are available to those affected by all forms of sexualized violence/abuse, their families, the general public, and other support/service providers.



About Wellness Within: An Organization for Health and Justice

Wellness Within is a registered non-profit organization that advocates for prison abolition and provides support to women, gender diverse and trans individuals who have experienced criminalization and are pregnant or parenting young children in Nova Scotia. The group began working together in 2012 and we served our first incarcerated client in 2014. WW's 90+ members include formerly incarcerated people, doulas, health care providers, lawyers, students, researchers, and mentors. WW volunteers have security clearance to provide support at the Nova Institution for Women Federal Prison, the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility Provincial jail, the Nova Scotia Youth Facility and in the community. WW works in partnership with community and advocacy organizations across Nova Scotia. WW's mandate includes doula service, public and health professional education about the health impacts of incarceration, community-based research about health and incarceration, and political advocacy.