

## **Speaking Notes for Downtown Eastside Women's Centre presentation to Standing Committee to Reform the *Police Act***

Speaking notes for Downtown Eastside Women's Centre Board member Andrea Glickman's remarks delivered to the B.C. Legislature's Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act on March 12, 2021

### **Intro**

- Good morning, my name is Andrea Glickman, and it is my honour and privilege to be speaking to you today on behalf of the [Downtown Eastside Women's Centre](#) (DEWC), in my capacity as board member. My diasporic ancestors are Guyanese, Portuguese, Indian, and Eastern European Jewish and I am an uninvited and first-generation settler here on Turtle Island. I would like to acknowledge the members of the committee today and also my fellow presenters.

### **Territorial Acknowledgement**

- We are extremely and forever grateful to the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations for hosting the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre shelter and drop-in centres in their unceded, unsundered and ancestral territories and for continuing to generously support the women who use DEWC. I am joining you today from the unceded, unsundered ancestral territories of the shíshálh Nation, and I am beyond humbled to be able to carry out this business from their land.
- DEWC produced a seminal submission into the National Inquiry into MMIWG, [Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in the DTES](#) which explores how individual experiences of violence are inseparable from state violence including loss of land, forced poverty, homelessness, child apprehension, criminalization within the justice system, and health disparities. Indigenous women comprise 70% of the women accessing DEWC. We stand with the Indigenous peoples whose territories comprise what is now known as British Columbia and we fully support restitution and having their stolen land given back as part of the critical work that must be done to fully end violence against Indigenous women and girls.

### **About DEWC and mandate**

- The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre began in 1978. The mission of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre is to provide a safe, non-judgmental environment for women from all walks of life, who live and/or work in the Downtown Eastside. To achieve this goal, the Centre provides supportive surroundings with meals, counseling, advocacy and programs which nurture and empower members including shelter beds.
- Our community also works towards increasing awareness of systemic injustice and inequalities that contribute to women's vulnerability. One of our goals is to bring awareness of poverty and violence issues to the general public and to the government. Women have been victimized and have not had their safety needs met, and measures must be taken to close that gap.

### **DEWC's interest in reforming the *Police Act***

- Your Committee is intended to consider reforms related to the modernization and sustainability of policing under the *Police Act* (R.S.B.C. 1996, c.367); the role of police with respect to complex

social issues including mental health and wellness, addictions and harm reduction; the scope of systemic racism within BC's police agencies; and whether there are measures necessary to ensure a modernized *Police Act* is consistent with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (2007).

- DEWC's interest in policing goes back more than 30 years dealing with police and reporting missing women to the VPD. Our focus on the safety and security of women, and particularly Indigenous, Black and women of colour who are disproportionately impacted by the police and comprise the majority of DEWC's members, has driven us to put together this presentation.
- To put it plainly- women are vulnerable to violence in many forms and the women who use DEWC are often at heightened risk of violence based on many intersecting factors including identity, poverty, health issues, and occupation. The rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, trans and two spirit people are disturbingly high and represent one of the most critical, glaring and ongoing human right issues in Canada and in BC. Many women who use DEWC and many women in the DTES are overpoliced, putting them into further risk of violence and harm by then needing to carry out their daily activities in riskier and more isolated spaces.
- In a DTES women's safety audit, only 15 percent of 157 women said they would go to the police if they felt unsafe.
- As detailed in the [Oppal Inquiry](#) into and in the [Final Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry](#), the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) failed to prevent and protect Indigenous women from violence, and failed to diligently investigate violence when it occurred. Again, DEWC directly experienced this absolute failure in policing through decades of reporting missing women to the police and not seeing action or support. While the Oppal Inquiry had poor scope and leadership, it did confirm that police did not listen to women in the DTES and it was a blatant failure in duty. It concluded almost 10 years ago and there has been no review to determine if all issues have been fixed.
- The *Police Act* is legislation empowering individuals working for the state to carry weapons that can kill, injure, restrain, arrest, interrogate and stop women, and so we are extremely interested in contributing to a serious review and revision of the Act. DEWC is not a well-resourced organization, and our capacity is focused entirely on providing front line service to women and children. To be honest, we expect our input to be taken seriously and we expect to see our recommendations implemented, because the lives of the women who use DEWC are at stake.
- The gruesome murder of a Coast Salish mother in 1992 catalyzed the annual Women's Memorial March, which continues years later to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and all women's lives lost in the DTES. Many homicides and disappearances are still unsolved, including the recent murders and disappearances of DEWC members **Lisa Arlene Francis, Angeline Pete, Ashley Machiskinic, and Verna Simard.**
- **Also Chelsea Poorman who is missing and Tonya Hyer who was murdered, more recently.**
- The recommendations we will make centre the enhanced safety of women and children, accountability of police, addressing and ending systemic racism through legislative tools, a legislated review system to audit police funding and commit to reduce funding for police to address issues that would be better addressed by professionals trained in mental health and harm reduction.

### **Recommendations for Reforming the *Police Act***

1. **The legislation must specifically be revised to explicitly keep women and children safe.** We categorically object to the police killing anyone including women and children. Chantel Moore, a much-loved Tla-o-qui-aht mother, daughter, granddaughter, was killed last year by the RCMP in Edmunston, NB, when she called 911 and they came for a “wellness check”. Every legislative tool must be used to ensure that that state sanctioned murder or abuse of women and children is not permitted. It has been suggested that health officials accompany or replace police on health checks.
  
2. **Include legislative provisions to address and prohibit systemic racism in the police system including an end to police stops and street checks.** We know that women of colour, and particularly Indigenous and black women, face higher rates of incarceration and police stops. We need collection of race-based data and funding to fully assess and address systemic racism within the policing system in BC, perhaps in concert with the BC Human Rights Commissioner.
  - a. Additionally, the *Police Act* must be reformed so that it is categorically clear that racism is not permitted. We call for creation of a provision that would make reporting racism by police offers mandatory and include clear consequences, because systemic racism can lead to harm to women and even to death. It is not something that can be addressed solely through cultural competency training. As Theresa Gray says in ‘Red Women Rising’, “the police should be held responsible for not taking violence against women seriously and for not doing their job.”
  
3. **The Special Committee should review “Red Women Rising” in its entirety in order to understand the context of Indigenous women survivors in the DTES, and should incorporate all recommendations, and particularly the recommendations with respect to policing.**

On April 3, 2019, DEWC released Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside based on the lived experience, leadership, and expertise of Indigenous survivors. This comprehensive report is the culmination of a participatory process with 113 Indigenous women and 15 non-Indigenous women regarding the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The report was co-authored by Carol Martin and Harsha Walia. The stories are organized thematically and there is a specific section on Policing, Prisons and the Justice System.

**The following contributors to Red Women Rising Corrine (CD) Demas, Sandra (Marie) Sonia Czechaczek, Sophie Merasty, Stella August, Beatrice Starr, Audrey Hill, Melinda Meltingtallow and Karen Boyd have died from the violence of poverty, the violence of addiction and inadequate medical services.**

I will highlight some key recommendations here.

- We recommend that administrative, disciplinary, or criminal measures are available to hold officials accountable when officers are found to have failed to act on reports of missing women or to have carried out biased or inadequate investigations of violence against Indigenous women.
- This should contain the responsibility of housing organizations and police to act on their safety protocols, in relation to missing persons. Communications between police, family and housing organizations should be transparent and coordinated.

- We call for a review and repair of police policies and procedures that are conducive to violence against Indigenous women, girls, trans and two-spirit people.
- We recommend providing Indigenous women, their families, and community advocates with an available and effective procedure to file complaints in the case of noncompliance or negligence by officials, and information on how to initiate and pursue that procedure.
- We call for the prohibition of the police from carrying and using all lethal weapons. Even in the most escalated scenario, there is no justification for a police-involved lethal shooting.
- Legislate elimination of the use of police restraint devices such as the hobble restraint device, and end the use of police dogs as weapons.
- We demand elimination of searches and monitoring of Indigenous women and girls by male police officers.
- All police forces should be mandated to implement Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines similar to those in Vancouver that support the safety of sex workers in police interactions.
- In reforming the *Police Act*, we call on the Province to make it easier to file a police complaint and establish an independent civilian watchdog that conducts investigations of reported incidents of serious police misconduct, including allegations of police violence and sexual assault. You must increase liability for the misconduct of police officers to include criminal charges.
- Allow the provincial Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner to initiate its own systemic investigations or hearings, and shift investigations of misconduct within the jurisdiction of the Police Complaint Commissioner to investigations directly by the Commissioner.
- Implement existing recommendations by Human Rights Watch in *Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada*, by the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, and from *Justice Reform for British Columbia* by Community Legal Assistance Society, Pivot Legal Society, West Coast LEAF, and B.C. Civil Liberties Association.

**4. The Special Committee should review the Calls for Justice in their entirety and implement the calls that are related to policing and to women’s safety in revising the *Police Act*.**

“Calls for Justice” -The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was released in June, 2019 after decades of Indigenous women and communities, including DEWC, demanding a national inquiry to the crisis. In the forward, the Commissioners note that their recommendations, their Calls for Justice, are legal imperatives- they are not optional. Key recommendations address increasing police training, education, transparency and accountability, and doing so in partnership with Indigenous peoples, and creation of a national task force with provincial and territorial participation, to

open up and investigate all 193 unsolved cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls.

**5. We call for a thorough and systematic review of police financing and budgets and a reallocation of non-police related work.**

The *Police Act* must include a legislated review system to audit police funding on a regular basis and must commit to continually reducing funding for police to address issues that would be better addressed by professionals trained in areas such as mental health and harm reduction. This must be built into any reform. Money that currently is spent on police delivering services they are not trained to deliver, would be better spent providing housing and food and other critical community needs that are severely underfunded and which, in their absence, increase the likelihood of engagement with the police.

**6. As per the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#), the Province must ensure that any revised *Police Act* is aligned with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.**

Article 22 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states:

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.
2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

We call for an independent, gender-based and Indigenous analysis of the *Police Act* and any proposed changes. Indigenous women must be involved in this analysis. First Nations as the proper Title and Rights holders must have the opportunity to review a consultation draft of the draft Bill prior to introduction, and they must be given the powers to recommend any changes. Full alignment as per the *Declaration Act* must be done in partnership with First Nations.

## **Closing**

The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre is a unique and special place because of the women who use it and who direct it. I would like to conclude by acknowledging the strength, brilliance and vibrancy of all of the women at DEWC and thank DEWC for giving me the opportunity to bring forward the voices of the women today. I also want to thank our Executive Director Alice Kendall and all the staff who work so hard every single day at the direction of DEWC members to create much needed safe spaces for women in the DTES. It is our collective responsibility to do everything we can to keep women and children safe, and it is our hope that you will centre this responsibility as you reform the *Police Act*. We call on the police to find our missing women and solve their murders.