



September 18, 2024

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

www.bpwcanada.com

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) respectfully submits the enclosed 2024 Brief for your consideration and action. The items herein represent the resolutions brought forward by our members from across the country which were debated and accepted at our National Convention held in August, 2024.

BPW Canada is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization that promotes and practices inclusion, diversity, equity and access. Our history includes over 90 years of advocacy for the inclusion of equal rights for women in legislation and policy. It is through this process of voicing the issues outlined in this Brief and engaging in open dialogue with your government that we can together build a strong and thriving Canada.

On behalf of BPW Canada, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the federal government's achievements to advance issues that impact working women. In particular, the establishment of a National Child Care Plan has been advocated by BPW Canada for over 50 years, and we are very excited to see the fruition of this endeavour. The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence encompasses many of our resolutions this year such as recognizing Femicide in the Criminal Code and Anti Human Trafficking legislation to support those victims of this heinous crime.

We respectfully request that you and the appropriate Ministers review the enclosed resolutions and be available to meet with our delegation at a time in keeping with your schedules. A member of BPW Canada will follow up with this correspondence with a personal contact to confirm the preferred meeting times and dates.

We commend your efforts to advance gender equality and look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Yours truly,

Shan McEwing
President 2024-2026
BPW Canada



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**Submission
to**

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JUSTIN TRUDEAU

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

BY



The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women

**La Fédération Canadienne des Femmes de Carrières Commerciales et
Professionnelles**

**Member of the International Federation of Business and Professional
Women**

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**Working towards improving economic, political, social, and
employment conditions for women in Canada**

“Women Working for Working Women”

September 2024



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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) is an equality seeking group working towards improving the economic, political, social and employment conditions for women. BPW Canada is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization that promotes and practices inclusion, diversity, equity and access. BPW Canada develops the professional and leadership potential of women through education, awareness, advocacy and mentoring within the supportive network of BPW.

In 1930, BPW Canada was a founding member of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. BPW International has Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1947 and is the recognized voice of working women in over 95 countries worldwide. As of September 30, 2021, BPW Canada has special Consultative Status.

For over ninety years we have advocated for women's rights at all levels and have played a significant role in achieving advancements for a just and equal society. For more information on our achievements, please visit our website at www.bpwcanada.com.

The BPW Canada Biennial Convention was held on August 9-11, 2024 in Moncton, NB. The resolutions contained in this document were initiated at the club level, researched, formulated, and brought to the 2024 Convention where they were debated and put to a vote. These accepted resolutions are herein presented for your consideration.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with our federal government representatives to present our resolutions and our concerns in more detail.

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Resolution #1: Prioritization of the Inclusion of Femicide into Canada's Criminal Code

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to:

1. amend the *Criminal Code* to include a legal definition of femicide as the intentional killing of women and girls because of their gender, encompassing various forms of gender-based violence against women and girls;
2. establish distinct legal provisions for femicide that are focused on the specific gendered nature of these crimes, ensuring appropriate investigation, prosecution, and sentencing guidelines;
3. conduct regular reviews and assessments of the effectiveness of these legal amendments and associated programs in collaboration with relevant stakeholders (i.e. women's advocacy organizations, legal experts, and victim advocacy groups), to make necessary adjustments and improvements;
4. work in conjunction with provincial and territorial governments to ensure a consistent and cohesive approach in addressing femicide across the country; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to implement femicide as first-degree murder in Canada's Criminal Code.

Rationale

Gender-related killings go beyond "ordinary" murder and often represent the final event of an extended and ignored continuum of violence, which is rooted in the unequal power relations between men and women" (UNODC, 2017). The United Nations defines femicide as the intentional gender-related killing of women and girls. The Government of Canada is a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), numerous Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women sessions, and Recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Defining femicide in the Criminal Code and recognizing femicide as a distinct offence can aid in addressing and preventing violence against women. This would also assist data collection to measure the extent of this issue since femicide is not an official term for many governments and police agencies.



In 2022 in Canada, 184 women and girls were killed—primarily by men; one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours (CWF, 2023); this is up 27% in 2022. The rate of femicide in Canada is five times higher among Indigenous than non-Indigenous women and girls. Women and girls are most likely to be killed by those closest to them (UN Women, 2022). Between 2011-2021, 77% of solved homicides of women and girls by male accused were gender-related. One third or 32% of gender-related homicides of women and girls were reported by police as motivated primarily by the accused's anger, despair, or frustration, a statistic which is almost triple that of non-gender related homicides (Cotter & Sutton, 2023)

Update

BPW Canada was encouraged to see the recognition of femicide related to an alleged act of intimate partner violence by the Ottawa Police Service on August 28, 2024 and the call to include the use of the term femicide in the Criminal Code as a gender based killing. It's believed to be the first time a police force in Canada has used the word in the context of a murder investigation where evidence is still being gathered. (CTV News, 2024).

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Resolution #2: Human Trafficking National Strategy Needs an Extension, Perpetuity, and Unilateral Response

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to ensure perpetuity of an ongoing national strategy to combat human trafficking that includes public input from stakeholders and NGOs, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with survivors, ethnic groups, the LGBTQIA+ community, and Indigenous persons; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to share oversight to assist provincial and territorial governments to create their own plans to combat human trafficking similar to Bill -251 in Ontario.

Rationale

Human trafficking is an offence under the *Criminal Code* of Canada and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. The constant movement traffickers use to exploit their victims helps them elude law enforcement and makes it nearly impossible for the victim to even know where they are. As most victims are trafficked for sexual purposes within Canada, city to city and province to province, the *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking* published by the Government of Canada in 2016 concluded that there must be an inter-jurisdictional plan of coordination if there is to be improved enforcement and conviction. (Government of Canada, 2016).

The *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking* consolidated federal activities into a comprehensive plan. When this Plan expired in 2016, the issue was addressed by establishing the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*. (Government of Canada, 2019). The expiration of this Strategy in 2024 is of concern. Canada needs federal coordination and oversight to strengthen pan-Canadian inter-jurisdictional prevention, intervention, awareness, and prosecutions to achieve national crime reduction and community support goals. This Strategy needs to be extended with input from stakeholders to ensure an effective plan to deal with this horrific issue.



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Resolution #3: Record Suspension and Expungement of Criminal Records for People Who Have Been Trafficked

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to amend *The Criminal Records Act* to include a new record suspension schedule for prostitution offences obtained while the offender was being trafficked; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the criminal records for prostitution of survivors of human trafficking be expunged so that no criminal record remains in any databases at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels.

Rationale

A survivor-led, human trafficking study completed by the National Survivor Network (2022) showed that the vast majority of human trafficking survivors have some kind of criminal record as a result of their trafficking experience. Criminal offences of prostitution by persons who are trafficked are unjust, given that the circumstances are beyond their control. Having a criminal record can be a barrier to women reintegrating into society and having their criminal records expunged may help survivors of human trafficking access employment and educational opportunities and also be protected from discrimination in federally regulated sectors by the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. BPW Canada asks that the *Criminal Records Act* be amended to include now defunct pre-2014 prostitution offences (The Bedford Decision). This amendment would allow survivors of human trafficking that were convicted of a prostitution-related offence to apply for a record suspension (Supreme Court of Canada, 2018).

A procedure was adopted through Bill C-66, the *Expunging Certain Historically Unjust Convictions Act* (EHUCA), to expunge criminal records under certain circumstances. The Governor in Council is authorized by the EHUCA to add other offences to the schedule when certain conditions are met, if the activity no longer constitutes an offence under an Act of Parliament and the Governor in Council is of the opinion that the criminalization of the activity constitutes a historical injustice (*Bill C-66 (42-1) - Royal Assent - Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act - Parliament of Canada*). These survivors were victims and need the opportunity to move on with their lives without being further victimized.



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National Survivor Network (2022). <https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/>



Resolution #4: Providing More Affordable Housing for Women in Canada

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to require that provincial, municipal governments, and private developers applying for federal funds under the National Housing Strategy (NHS) meet the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) criteria for affordable housing, and that the outcome of units created be measured and reported each year;

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada to require that as part of funding to municipalities that municipalities and developers be required to add 20% affordable rental housing, restricted to minimum 30-40 years of affordable rental, to their proposals under the NHS, funded by means of added density, tax subsidies and/or low-cost loans to incentivize the building of affordable units;

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada, through the NHS programs to ensure that the segment of the population with core housing needs that is middle income female household core need be recognized and provided with targeted funding for the creation of affordable rental units.

Rationale

Improvements in the Federal Housing funding criteria are required along with directives to deliver more units and to identify female households that require core housing needs as a primary target for housing creation. CMHC statistics show that 18% of women are renters versus 16% of men. For lone-parent family households, 27% are female-led compared to 16% male-led (CMHC Website, 2019).

Since the 2017 enactment of the *Federal National Housing Strategy Act (NHS)*, there has not been a measurable creation of housing for the 530,000 families in housing need and the funding for construction of 160,000 new affordable housing units originally promised (CHMC 2023). There is no standard definition of affordability within the NHS programs. Spending is presented as for affordable units but may require households to devote more than 30% of their total before tax income as defined by the CMHC. A requirement for affordability to be maintained for 30-40 years may result in stable rental housing that does not expire and new construction quotas may be imposed on municipalities and coax private developers with new financial instruments, tax rebates and regulatory incentives. As women are the majority of those affected by the affordable housing issues, it is important for the Government to take these steps to improve the situation.



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