



Date: Thursday April 17, 2014

Deputation to: City of Toronto's Community Development and Recreation Committee

Submitted by: Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director, METRAC

Re: Feasibility of 24-Hour Drop-in Service for Women (CD28.2)

METRAC is a Toronto community-based organization founded in 1984 to prevent violence towards women and youth. This deputation is submitted in support of the proposed 24-hour drop-in service for women, recommended by the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration.

For 30 years, METRAC has identified women's fear and experience of gender-based violence as a significant quality of life issue in the City of Toronto. Higher rates of intimate partner violence, death and injury; sexual violence; and fear of violence are a manifestation of the discrimination and social inequalities women face in our broader society. They can serve as a tremendous barrier to safety and curtail freedom on the street and outdoors. It is our understanding that current services during overnight hours fail to meet all women's needs, especially given the shortage of shelter beds for women in the city. This lack of services puts women at an increased risk of violence, particularly those who often face social marginalization such as low income and homelessness. Unfortunately, we believe this increased risk has manifested itself in brutal attacks against women over the past six months (for example, read http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/11/25/activists_decry_sex_assault_at_dundassherbourne_rally.html).

As far back as 2007, Street Health made a recommendation to the City to "expand the number and hours of service of women-only drop-ins, year-round" (http://ywcacanada.ca/data/research_docs/00000019.pdf). It is disappointing that seven years later, this recommendation has not yet been implemented and is still on the table for discussion.

METRAC supports the creation of a 24-hour drop-in centre with free, safe and accessible space for diverse women, which would be available while other services are closed. Availability of these services would increase options and alternatives and provide essential services to women unable to access shelters, offering respite in evening and early morning hours.

We also stress the importance of ensuring this drop-in integrates needs of women at highest risk of violence, including girls and young women, women with mental health needs, women with disabilities and Deaf women, women living and working on the street, sex workers, Aboriginal women, senior women and other vulnerable groups, including trans people who are at particularly high risk of gender-based violence. Needs

of these groups must be taken into consideration to ensure an increase in safety and a reduction of service barriers, victimization and mortality rates.

It is our view that a 24-hour drop-in for women would reduce the threat and risk of violence towards street-involved women, address a long-standing gap in services and better fulfill Toronto's commitments to a high quality of life for over half of our city's population.