



Date: Friday March 14, 2014

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

Submitted by: Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director, METRAC

Re: Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020 (CD27.5)

METRAC is a Toronto community organization founded in 1984 to prevent violence towards women and youth. This deputation responds to the proposed Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020 (TSNS 2020), which assesses Neighbourhood Equity Scores using Urban HEART @ Toronto indicators and identifies Neighbourhood Improvement Areas for 2014 and beyond.

TSNS 2020's goal of equitable outcomes for all neighbourhoods is commendable and essential for leveling quality of life and opportunities for marginalized communities. Urban HEART indicators – Economic Opportunities, Social Development, Healthy Lives, Participation in Decision-Making and Physical Surroundings – are core to analyzing the well-being of our city. Nonetheless, METRAC is concerned that the indicators do not currently include measures of community safety, especially for women, girls, youth and others at high risk of sexual assault, sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.

For 30 years, METRAC has identified fear and experience of gender-based violence as a significant quality of life issue affecting more than half of the city's population and the vast majority of families and communities. METRAC's Community Safety Audit tool, recommended in 1999 by the City of Toronto's Task Force on Community Safety for implementation in all neighbourhoods, continues to produce results that show the importance residents place on living in safe communities. This tool remains compelling and relevant today because it is premised on the understanding that public spaces must be safer for those at high risk of gender-based violence.

UN Women has cited that experience and fear of sexual violence in public spaces creates a barrier for women and girls' equal participation in daily life. It limits their participation in school, work and public life; curtails their ability to access essential services; reduces their enjoyment of cultural and recreational opportunities; and negatively impacts their health and well-being. UN Women notes that "violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it" (www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-publicspaces#sthash.h898CBtP.dpuf).

The City of Toronto's founding and ongoing support of METRAC, as well as its work on the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, TSNS 2020 and other similar initiatives, is promising and credible. But it is critically important that gender-based violence and safety for women, girls and others at high risk be incorporated into Urban HEART indicators, the development of the "Neighbourhood Lens", and current and future initiatives to foster a truly equitable city for everyone.