



**Canadian Union of
Public Employees**

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Part-Time
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*Toronto Community
Housing Corporation*

**SERVING OUR
MEMBERS
SINCE
1942**

November 30, 2015

HL8.1.1

Councillor Joe Mihevc, Chair, and
Members of the Board of Health
c/o Clerk's Office
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Mihevc and Members of the Board of Health:

RE: HL8.1 Action on Intimate Partner Violence against Women

On behalf of all CUPE Local 79 members, thank you for the report and recommendations on Intimate Partner Violence against Women dedicated to the memory of Zahra Abdille and her sons, who were killed on November 29, 2014. Zahra was a public health nurse and a member of CUPE Local 79. Zahra was a sister to us.

A year ago, I attended her funeral. It was a very emotional experience for me and everyone who was present.

I can't stress enough how important this report is – critically important. We must do everything in our power to prevent tragedies like this from happening whether it's a City employee or anyone else in our communities. The City, the Province, the Federal government and CUPE Local 79 must do all we can and act together to stop the violence that ended so tragically for Zahra, and her sons Faris and Zain.

The recommendations in the report on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are strong and clear and must be heeded. Collaboration with other City Divisions, urging the province to increase supports and services, and seeking resources from the Federal government to help women facing domestic violence are all vitally important. The recommendations to review the Toronto Police Services policies, obtain data from Statistics Canada and involve the City's Occupational Health Safety Co-ordinating Committee, Toronto School Boards and Legal Aid are all ways to build a support system to protect women who are coping with violence.

As an employer, the provincial legislation (Occupational Health and Safety Act) requires that, "If an employer becomes aware, or ought reasonably to be aware that domestic violence that would likely expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer shall take every reasonable precaution for the protection of the worker." The Board of Health Staff Report notes that the City policy on domestic violence needs strengthening. The report identifies the need for education and training about violence in the workplace, implementation and further supports. When speaking with City workers they stressed the need for more training and one of the best ways to get information out to employees is through workplace health and safety committees, which have the legal foundation to make change happen in the workplace. Bill 132, Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan (Supporting Survivors and Challenging Sexual Violence and Harassment), 2015 has passed first reading in the provincial legislature.

One of the goals of the Report by The Board of Health is to increase the capacity of Toronto Public Health to address intimate partner violence in the workplace. When Bill 132 is passed it will change the definition of domestic violence, under the OHSA, and the City will need to be pro-active and reassess its policies, awareness and implementation in the context of Bill 132.

The City can still be a leader in driving change to protect women and families facing domestic violence.

Many Local 79 members face violence at home, on their way to work and sometimes at work, when domestic violence follows them to the workplace. (The majority of Local 79 members are women.)

The City could have done more to support and protect Zahra and her children. One of the main failings for Zahra was a lack of access to the legal advice she needed, and resources for her legal expenses. Zahra took on a second job to pay for her legal expenses because City supports were not there for her. The City must be a leader and a model employer and put in place all the supports that are needed – including legal and psychological supports. We must act on these recommendations and make this world a safe place for women and children – nothing could be more important.

We must all learn lessons from this sad and preventable tragedy.

A number of years ago, Local 79 established a Domestic Violence Committee which I was involved in because I had seen, first-hand, the impact of domestic violence on family members, friends and colleagues.

Local 79 took proposals to the bargaining table and over a number of rounds of collective bargaining. Local 79 and the City worked collaboratively to put in place education and supports for City employees who were victims of domestic violence. Sadly, in 2012 the City refused to negotiate with Local 79 on many issues and specifically refused to negotiate the language around domestic violence. Because the City imposed the Collective Agreement – that language is no longer there. This is the context within which Zahra's issues took place.

One of the lessons learned here must be that we work collaboratively. The other lesson is that we put every measure possible in place to educate City workers on the issues of domestic violence and supports for those impacted.

I commend and thank the Board of Health for taking a leadership role with this Report and acting on the heartbreaking death of Zahra and her sons.

Finally, as we say in the labour movement, 'Let us Mourn the Dead – but Fight for the Living'. Let's fight for people in situations like Zahra.

Yours truly,



Tim Maguire
President