

Declaring Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic in the City of Toronto

Date: July 12, 2023

To: City Council

From: Mayor Olivia Chow

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mayor Chow recommends that:

1. City Council declare a gender-based violence and intimate-partner violence an epidemic in Toronto.
2. City Council urge provincial and federal governments to rightfully declare intimate partner and gender-based violence an epidemic and enact the additional 85 recommendations from the inquest into the 2015 murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam in Renfrew County, Ontario, which provide a roadmap to preventing intimate partner violence from escalating to femicide.
3. City Council request the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) to declare a gender-based and intimate partner violence epidemic across the country.
4. City Council advocate that Femicide be added as a term to the Criminal Code of Canada and state its position to the Honourable David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General Canada, and the Prime Minister of Canada.
5. City Council request the provincial and federal governments to provide the necessary support to meaningfully address the gender-based violence and intimate-partner violence epidemic.
6. City Council direct the City Manager in consultation with the Medical Office of Health, the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration, the Director of the Indigenous Affairs Office, and the Chief People Officer to consider the best ways to actualize this declaration through community safety, wellbeing, and other related plans and making meaningful investments to the programs and services that prevent intimate partner and gender based violence and support those who face it.
7. City Council forward this item to Toronto MPs and MPPs, and to Ontario's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

Many years ago, in the middle of the night, I received a call from my mother. It was a call I dreaded – she was crying and screaming. My dad had beaten her savagely. After I convinced her to go to the hospital, she lived with me in my small apartment, me on a mattress on the floor, my mother in bed. She was able to rebuild and start the next chapter of her life because she had me to support her. A safe and affordable place made all the difference for me and my mom. So many women in our city don't have that.

In Canada, Women and Gender Equality Canada reported that 6.2 million women and girls aged 15 and over have reported experiencing abuse in the context of an intimate relationship. In addition to experiencing significant life disruptions such as the loss of community and financial strain, survivors of intimate partner and domestic violence risk housing instability and homelessness, risks of which are compounded by the lack of affordable market housing, discriminatory financial assistance policies, and insufficient shelter spaces across Canada.

Women, girls and gender diverse people living with disabilities, precarious immigration status, Indigenous women and girls, racialized and newcomer women and girls, as well as trans and non-binary people, face increased levels of violence and are at greater risk of intimate partner violence. In the past three years, there has been a staggering rise in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate.

Femicide is defined by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA) as 'the killing of all women and girls primarily by, but not exclusively, men.' CFOJA found that between 2018 and 2022 one woman was killed every 48 hours in Canada, the majority of identified accusers have been male suspects. The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability 2022 report revealed that 58 per cent of females were killed in urban areas like Toronto.

The June 2023 Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Homes (OAITH) Femicide report, revealed that in just 30 weeks, 30 femicide victims lost their lives to gender-based violence. In Toronto, nine femicides have occurred in the current reporting year, two-thirds of which were known by their perpetrator. This past May, three femicide cases (confirmed and unconfirmed) occurred in Toronto.

Femicide is recognized by the United Nations as the most extreme form of violence and discrimination against women and girls. Femicide is a result of gender-based violence and 22 countries specifically reference it in their criminal legislation. Canada does not currently include the term femicide in their criminal legislation. The World Health Organization (WHO) identified Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as a major global public health concern that affects millions of people and can result in immediate and long-lasting health, social and economic consequences.

Incidences of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence increased exponentially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and have not decreased, while

funding to provide the growing demand of services and support for victims and survivors of intimate partner and gender based violence has not kept pace.

The City of Toronto has recognized Intimate Partner Violence as a health equity issue and implemented an Intimate Partner Action Plan through Toronto Public Health. In 2021 the City of Toronto passed a motion to establish a gender-based violence community safety plan as a part of SafeTO and the City of Toronto established a gender equity office in 2021 to address issues of gender inequity. Through the Reconciliation Action Plan, the City of Toronto is also developing a plan to implement the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report.

More than 30 municipalities and regions (including the City of Ottawa, Peel, Durham and Halton regions, Lanark County, Renfrew County) across Ontario have declared a gender-based violence and/or intimate partner violence epidemic. Declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic would be to declare the first of 86 recommendations of the inquest into the 2015 murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam in Renfrew County, Ontario. On the eve of the anniversary of the aforementioned inquest the Ontario government rejected the recommendation to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. By declaring gender-based violence and intimate partner violence an epidemic, Toronto can join the growing number of municipalities in Canada in demanding action from all levels of government to address this growing epidemic.

SIGNATURE

Oliva Chow
Mayor

ATTACHMENTS
