



## **Equality for Newfoundland and Labrador Women**

A BRIEF SUBMITTED BY

**Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women  
Newfoundland and Labrador**

TO THE HONOURABLE LOYOLA SULLIVAN  
MINISTER OF FINANCE

AT THE PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS  
DECEMBER 8, 2006  
ST. JOHN'S, NL

## About the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women Newfoundland & Labrador

- What** The mandate of the Advisory Council is to advise the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and bring before Government and the public the social, economic, political, legal and cultural matters relating to advancing the status of women in the province. The Advisory Council is an arms-length, independent organization which draws its information, analysis and strategies from provincial equality-seeking feminist organizations, individual women, and other organizations that work to advance women's equality.
- Who** The 11-member Advisory Council is appointed for three-year terms by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Appointments reflect the regional representation of women with diverse backgrounds. All Members are eligible for reappointment. The President / CEO position is salaried and filled through an open competition. Council Members, other than the President / CEO, are selected through an open nomination process. Criteria for selection include demonstrated leadership in working to advance the status of women and the ability to work on women's equality and equity-seeking issues from a community, regional or provincial perspective. Advisory Council Staff maintain a consistent presence on issues of women's equality and inclusion, and conduct the day to day work of the Council.
- Why** The Advisory Council recognizes that women's equality and inclusion are essential to the decision making which guides the direction of our organizations, communities and province. However, women are still not equal in our society and, despite the advances of recent decades, violence and gender discrimination are pervasive. The Advisory Council uses its strong connection to women's groups to provide information and analysis to Government about the differing impacts of programs, policies, services and legislation on women, families and communities.
- When** The Advisory Council was established in 1980 by the Government of the day and received legislative standing with the introduction of the *Status of Women Advisory Council Act*. Throughout its history, Council Members and Staff have worked with Premiers, Cabinet Ministers, Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, and interested Members of the House of Assembly from all political parties to advance the status of women throughout the province.
- How** The Advisory Council advises, advocates, lobbies and educates on issues affecting the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador. This work is accomplished by using the information and analysis of the Council, the skills of Staff and the sharing of strategies with other women's equality organizations. The Advisory Council uses feminist process and practice both within the framework of Council meetings and its team approach to Staff work.
- Where** The Advisory Council office is located in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Staff and Council members are accessible by phone, fax and email, and are available to meet with community and government representatives.

## **Summary of 2007 Budget Recommendations Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women**

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women respectfully submits the following recommendations for Government consideration in preparing Budget 2007:

<b>Recommendation 1:</b>	<b>Funding to Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women</b>
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- Approve increased funding for the Advisory Council as per our submission to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

<b>Recommendation 2:</b>	<b>Funding to Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres</b>
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- Increase funding to each of the eight Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres to a minimum of \$100,000.00 per year in Budget 2007.

<b>Recommendation 3:</b>	<b>Funding to Women's Policy Office</b>
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- Provide dedicated annual funding to the Women's Policy Office to cover the cost of a yearly meeting with equality-seeking women's organizations.

<b>Recommendation 4:</b>	<b>Funding to Grassroots Equality-Seeking Organizations</b>
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- Expand the current level of funding to grassroots equality-seeking organizations and strategically invest in the voices of Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and multi-cultural women.

<b>Recommendation 5:</b>	<b>Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Programming</b>
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- Continue to expand the resources required to support additional initiatives under the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* as they become identified.
- Provide necessary resources to all of those Government departments and agencies which provide essential social programs and services to women, families and communities in our Province.

<b>Recommendation 6:</b>	<b>Minimum Wage</b>
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- Set out a new schedule for further increases to the minimum wage designed to raise it to a liveable wage within a specific time frame.

<b>Recommendation 7:</b>	<b>Gender Inclusive Analysis</b>
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- Continue to develop mechanisms for applying gender inclusive analysis to all departmental and decision-making processes, including the 2007 budget.
- Allocate resources for two full-time Gender Equity Policy Advisors; and that those positions be assigned to the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro.

<b>Recommendation 8:</b>	<b>Family-Friendly Treasury Board Guidelines</b>
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- Authorize Treasury Board to include the reimbursement of family care in its guidelines for compensating volunteers and allocate the necessary resources to cover these costs.

<b>Recommendation 9:</b>	<b>National Child Care and Early Learning Programs</b>
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- Continue to lobby the Federal Government for a comprehensive National Child Care and Early Learning Program.

<b>Recommendation 10:</b>	<b>Housing and Risk of Homelessness</b>
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- Begin a process to develop appropriate rent control legislation.
- Begin working with community stakeholders to develop a strategy for the use of dollars available through the Affordable Housing Trust.
- Develop a more responsive and adequate heat subsidy program.
- Lobby the Federal Government for increased federal funding for the Home Repair Program and vigorously defend the continuation of this essential program.
- Expand the Provincial Home Repair Program to include a grant for oil tank repair and replacement

<b>Recommendation 11:</b>	<b>Legal Aid Services</b>
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- Continue to lobby for increased federal funding for legal aid services, while exploring ways to improve the current services provided for family law matters.
- Change the current Legal Aid policy so that women who would otherwise qualify for Legal Aid based on income no longer have to provide letters of refusal from three private practice lawyers in order to qualify for Legal Aid assistance in matrimonial property disputes.

## Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women Provincial Pre-Budget Recommendations

<b>Recommendation 1:</b>	<b>Funding to Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women</b>
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The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women currently operates with an overall annual budget of less than \$300,000 per year. The current Council is in the first year of its three-year term. We are pleased that your Government is fully committed to the continuation of the Advisory Council; however, we already find ourselves challenged by our current budget.

**Accessible Infrastructure:** The Advisory Council is fully committed to our mandate and to the women of our province. In order to provide an inclusive organization, we are selling our inaccessible building and seeking fully accessible leased office space. We must upgrade our office infrastructure in order to bring down barriers to women's participation in our organization. The Advisory Council is seeking additional resources in order to move forward with a barrier-free provincial organization.

**Increased Travel Costs:** The cost of travel has increased substantially. It is difficult for the Advisory Council to budget for the costs of quarterly Council meetings as well as the in-person governance work required under the Transparency and Accountability guidelines. In addition, it is incumbent on the Advisory Council to work closely with women's organizations throughout the province, as well as occasionally out of province. While Council meetings, outreach, and consultation work are critical to fulfilling our legislated mandate, we are hampered in this regard by limited resources.

**Staffing:** Until 1996, the Advisory Council was resourced with five full-time staff. Due to budget cuts made by the government of the day, the Advisory Council lost funding for two of those positions. For the past decade, we have operated with three full-time staff. In order to effectively meet our mandate to provide the best advice and recommendations possible, we are requesting additional funding for a full-time permanent Research and Policy Analyst position for 2007.

- **We request that Government approve increased funding for the Advisory Council as per our submission to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.**

<b>Recommendation 2:</b>	<b>Funding to Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres</b>
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Your Government currently has service delivery contracts in place with eight Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres. They are located in Corner Brook, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador City, Port aux Basques, St. John's and Stephenville.

These vibrant and vital organizations currently receive \$75,000 per year to provide women with critical support, referral, information, consultation, crisis, counselling and advocacy services; services which are not provided elsewhere and which are invaluable to women and their families.

In addition to all of this work, the Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres also contribute significantly to the social and economic development of their communities and regions in a variety of different ways. However, their current level of funding is simply inadequate; \$75,000 does not reasonably cover the costs associated with staffing and overhead.

- **We recommend that Government increase funding to each of the eight Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres to a minimum of \$100,000.00 per year in Budget 2007.**

<b>Recommendation 3:</b>	<b>Funding to Women's Policy Office for Annual Meeting of Equality-Seeking Women's Organizations</b>
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Women's groups have long identified the need for the Women's Policy Office to hold an annual meeting with Status of Women Councils / Women's Centres and other equality-seeking women's organizations. Such a meeting would enhance the government / community collaborative effort to advance women's equality. However, the Women's Policy Office does not have dedicated funds to cover the costs of such a meeting.

- **We recommend that Government provide dedicated annual funding to the Women's Policy Office to cover the cost of a yearly meeting with equality-seeking women's organizations.**

<b>Recommendation 4:</b>	<b>Funding to Grassroots Equality-Seeking Organizations</b>
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We cannot overstate the need for Government to continue to resource community-based equality-seeking and anti-violence organizations that provide advocacy on issues of equality and inclusion, violence prevention, services for victims of violence, education and employment services, and public education programs. Among these are:

- Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (THANL)
- Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis & Prevention Centre
- Shelters and Transition Houses
- Women Interested in Successful Employment (WISE)
- Women in Resource Development Committee (WRDC)
- Regional Coordinating Coalitions Against Violence
- Family Resource Centres

In Budget 2006, your Government demonstrated an increased level of commitment and financial support to the **Violence Prevention Initiative**. You wisely increased funding for some of the groups listed above and provided funds for an annual violence prevention stakeholder meeting; however, there is more work to be done.

Women who have disabilities and immigrant women continue to face multiple forms of discrimination within our society. The **Coalition of Persons with Disabilities** and the **Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador** are the primary organizations which advocate for their issues. Unfortunately both of these organizations are seriously under-resourced; therefore, we encourage your Government to strategically invest increased resources in these organizations.

Your Government supported **Aboriginal women** to come together with government representatives for two very important conferences in March and November 2006. The voices of Aboriginal women are only beginning to be heard and your ongoing commitment to working with them is essential. Resources must continue to be allocated to support their work in community and with Government partners. Resources must also be allocated for the solutions they identify for the serious issues they deal with in their lives and communities, wherever your jurisdiction permits.

- **We recommend that Government expand its current level of funding to grassroots equality-seeking organizations and strategically invest in the voices of Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and multi-cultural women.**

<b>Recommendation 5:</b>	<b>Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Programming</b>
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We are pleased that your Government is working to alleviate the social and economic impacts of poverty on a variety of different fronts. The new **Poverty Reduction Strategy** has the potential to reduce and alleviate the scope and depth of poverty in our Province. The Advisory Council is committed to providing ongoing advice and recommendations to help move the **Strategy** forward.

- **We recommend that Government continue to expand the resources required to support additional initiatives under the Poverty Reduction Strategy as they become identified.**

In addition, services and programs that provide justice, health, education, income support, and other social services play a critical role in ensuring that all residents of the province can fully participate in the cultural, legal, social, political and economic benefits of society. These services and programs must be adequately resourced.

- **We recommend that Government provide necessary resources to all of those Government departments and agencies which provide essential social programs and services to women, families and communities in our Province.**

<b>Recommendation 6:</b>	<b>Minimum Wage</b>
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Raising the minimum wage is of great significance to the women of Newfoundland and Labrador. During 2003, 24,000 people in our province worked for \$6.00 - 6.99 per hour; 68% of these workers were women. The majority of low-income earners in Newfoundland and Labrador are women who work in retail and service sectors, usually in entry level, unskilled, non-unionized positions without pension plans, health and other benefits, or opportunities to advance into better positions. They are the lowest income earners in the province and, consequently, the most vulnerable to poverty, violence, and further exclusion.

The last scheduled increase in the minimum wage will take effect on January 1, 2007, bringing it to \$7.00 per hour. At that rate, full-time minimum wage workers and their families will still be living far below the poverty line. Unfortunately, their lives will not be much better when they receive their January 15<sup>th</sup> paycheques.

- **We recommend that Government set out a new schedule for further increases to the minimum wage designed to raise it to a liveable wage within a specific time frame.**

<b>Recommendation 7:</b>	<b>Gender Inclusive Analysis</b>
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Gender inclusive analysis is a process that assesses the impacts on women of policies, programs, practices, services, legislation and budget allocations from the initial planning stages, through the entire development process, to the final implementation and evaluation. It is necessary because women’s roles, relationships, and economic and social circumstances are different from men’s, and women have unequal access to power and resources.

Gender inclusive analysis also means considering the diversity of women, and taking into account the further discrimination women often experience based on our race, class, age, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other factors.

Your Government wisely committed to integrating women’s voices and perspectives into public policy in the 2006 and 2005 Speeches from the Throne.

- **We recommend that Government continue to develop mechanisms for applying gender inclusive analysis to all departmental and decision-making processes, including the 2007 budget.**

While this ongoing work has the potential to benefit the women of our Province in many ways, there are two specific areas which need focussed attention at this time.

The Royal Newfoundland Constabulary has been a traditionally male-dominated organization. A Gender Equity Policy Advisor will increase the capacity of the RNC to create a modern and responsive organization which is inclusive and respectful of women and men equally.

The Town of Churchill Falls functions similar to many company towns, particularly with respect to an absence of services and resources for women who find themselves in difficult circumstances. We believe that Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro holds some responsibility for developing appropriate solutions to these issues. A Gender Equity Policy Advisor would provide valuable assistance in these areas.

- **We recommend that Government allocate resources for two full-time Gender Equity Policy Advisors, and that those positions be assigned to the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro.**

<b>Recommendation 8:</b>	<b>Family-Friendly Treasury Board Guidelines</b>
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We congratulate your Government on filling 50% of the vacancies on various Agencies, Boards and Commissions with women during the past several months. We look forward to the day when gender parity has been fully realized.

However, women bear a real cost when they participate in this important work. Throughout most of its twenty-six year history, the Advisory Council has requested Treasury Board approval for the reimbursement of family care expenses when required by Council members to attend meetings. Other women’s groups have also regularly requested such reimbursement in order to attend Government-funded meetings and conferences.

It is long past time for Treasury Board to update its guidelines for compensating members of various Government Agencies, Boards, and Commissions to include the reimbursement of family care.

- **We recommend that Government authorize Treasury Board to include the reimbursement of family care in its guidelines for compensating volunteers and allocate the necessary resources to cover these costs.**

<b>Recommendation 9:</b>	<b>National Child Care and Early Learning Programs</b>
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Without a doubt, the lack of affordable, accessible, flexible, quality child care continues to be a significant barrier to women and their families.

Your Government had developed a broad implementation plan for 2006 based on the previous Federal Government’s commitment to this issue. Unfortunately, the current Federal Government reneged on that agreement and provided significantly reduced dollars in budget 2006. We know it will take a combined Federal / Provincial / Territorial effort to create the comprehensive program that families need in our Province and across the country.

- **We recommend that your Government continue to lobby the Federal Government for a comprehensive National Child Care and Early Learning Program.**

<b>Recommendation 10:</b>	<b>Housing and Risk of Homelessness</b>
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Having a decent roof over one’s head should be a basic right in our society, yet access to safe, affordable, accessible housing continues to be a major problem for women and their families. Many women are living in unsuitable accommodations. Many have to turn off the heat in order to pay the rent.

While some of the targeted measures included in Budget 2006 have decreased the cost of housing for some families, significant problems remain for many of our citizens, particularly women.

Boom times create huge increases in the cost of rent along with significant housing shortages. Increased economic activity in Labrador West is forcing women and their families out of their homes. Disregard for our neighbours seems to be the order of the day when local economies take a leap forward. Reports out of Alberta tell frightening tales of employed people living in homeless shelters.

- **We recommend that Government begin a process to develop appropriate rent control legislation.**

When housing is available but not affordable, women and their families suffer enormous hardships. There is a shortage of affordable, accessible, safe housing across the country, and our Province is no exception.

The Federal Government has created an Affordable Housing Trust (Bill C48), with dollars allocated to each Province and Territory through the use of third party trust funds. These dollars are to be used for Affordable Housing, Northern Housing, and Aboriginal Off-Reserve Housing.

- **We recommend that Government begin working with community stakeholders to develop a strategy for the use of dollars available through the Affordable Housing Trust.**

The cost of heating an apartment or home is often out of reach for individuals and families living in poverty. Mothers turn off the heat during the day while children are at school. Single older women wrap themselves in blankets day and night. Home heating is essential in our climate; however, when you’re poor, it can be a luxury. No one

should have to choose between heating their home and eating. The current heating fuel rebate is neither responsive nor adequate. As well, rebates are only helpful after the fact; they don't pay the bill in February.

- **We recommend that Government develop a more responsive and adequate heat subsidy program.**

There is some question as to whether the Federal Government intends to discontinue providing funding for the Provincial Home Repair Program. While our province enjoys the highest rate of home ownership in the country, the ability to continue living in one's own home is a fragile reality for many. The Provincial Home Repair Program provides critical funding for people who live in poverty and cannot bear the costs of essential renovations, including those required for physical access.

- **We recommend that Government lobby the Federal Government for increased federal funding for the Home Repair Program and vigorously defend the continuation of this essential program.**

Oil tank repair and replacement is essential, and the March 31, 2007 deadline looms large. While many individuals and families have found a way to cope with replacing their oil tanks, others are simply unable to afford to do so. And once again, rebates only help after the fact; there is no help for those who have neither the cash nor access to credit in order to pay the bill.

- **We recommend that Government expand the Provincial Home Repair Program to include a grant for oil tank repair and replacement**

<b>Recommendation 11:</b>	<b>Legal Aid Services</b>
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The Advisory Council has supported the Department of Justice in its efforts to gain increased federal funding for Legal Aid services in the past and will continue to do so until our Province has a level of service which properly addresses the need.

There is no doubt that the capacity of the Legal Aid Commission needs to be expanded and improved. While some improvements were made in Budget 2006, much remains to be done, particularly in the provision of Legal Aid services for family law cases. Women often have enormous difficulty accessing the services they require in these situations.

- **We recommend that Government continue to lobby for increased federal funding for legal aid services, while exploring ways to improve the current services provided for family law matters.**

In addition, women who are involved with legal disputes over matrimonial property, who would qualify for Legal Aid based on their income, are required to seek letters of refusal from three private practice lawyers before they can receive assistance from Legal Aid. This is an additional financial cost to women who cannot afford a lawyer and compromises their access to justice.

- **We recommend that Government change the current Legal Aid policy so that women who would otherwise qualify for Legal Aid based on income no longer have to provide letters of refusal from three private practice lawyers in order to qualify for Legal Aid assistance in matrimonial property disputes.**

## **Conclusion**

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the provincial women's community ask that the decisions and outcomes of Budget 2007 reflect concrete steps toward advancing women's equality in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **Acknowledgments**

This brief was researched and written by the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Fall 2006.

For additional information, please contact:

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