

Letter to the Editor

No thanks to Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods

June 29, 2007

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women doesn't want safer neighbourhoods.

At least, not in the way the Department of Justice has in mind. Recently, Bill 9, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, made its way through the House of Assembly and will become law this October. While some people think our neighbourhoods have gotten scary, this legislation is even scarier.

When this bill becomes law, the province will have the power to evict people from their homes for engaging in activities that "adversely affect" communities.

We already have a criminal code and justice system designed to deal with illegal activities. We also have the Residential Tenancies Act which provides the Do's and Don'ts of renting properties. Both have checks and balances in place to make sure everyone gets a fair shake. The truly scary part about Bill 9 is that it over-rides these existing pieces of legislation along with their safe-guards. Under Bill 9, people can be forced from their homes for activities that aren't even illegal. Even scarier are the loose definitions in the bill. Where the criminal code uses the standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt," SCAN investigators can simply go by a "balance of probability" that the property "is being used for unsafe activities." So if you're *probably* doing something that somebody *thinks* is unsafe, out you go.

What about people living in residences who are not involved in questionable activities? Under this legislation, they'll get evicted, too. In real terms, women and children could be thrown onto the streets. The government says it will find alternative housing before tossing them out but as community advocates have tried to point out, there is no emergency housing available. Our shelters are full.

Manitoba adopted this legislation in 2002. Since then, a handful of other provinces and territories have made it law. Yet there's no research that shows it works to reduce crime. The stats only show how many houses in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have been shut down. They say nothing about whether people simply moved the activities to another residence or miraculously gave it up all together.

Until this bill becomes law, the Advisory Council will continue to voice its opposition and advise the government to drop this legislation.

Sincerely,
Leslie MacLeod
President/CEO

