

Media Release

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Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Dangerous legislation making its way through Provincial legislature

The Provincial Advisory Council and Status of Women groups are floored by the Province's lack of meaningful consultation on the Safer Communities and Neighborhoods Act that is being pushed through provincial legislature.

"Consultation with community groups on this bill has been virtually non-existent," says Michelle Murdoch with the Provincial Advisory Council.

Right now, the Provincial Government is pushing through the SCAN Act. Yesterday, the bill went to second reading in the House of Assembly. If it passes, the legislation gives the Province the power to shut down homes they believe are used for illicit activity.

"We're very disturbed by the speed at which this Bill is being moved through the system," says Lorraine Sheehan with the Bay St. George Status of Women Council. "There hasn't been adequate consultation or time for community groups to express their concerns."

Noreen Careen is with the Labrador West Status of Women Council. She adds, "I am angered and disgusted that consultations took place in December and grassroots organizations such as ours were never included. If asked, we would have told them how harmful this bill will be to the province's most vulnerable groups."

If the Province gives itself the right to evict people from their homes, women's groups want to know what will happen to residents *not involved* in illicit activities; that is, to people who simply live at the residence in question. Careen points out that Labrador West is experiencing a serious housing shortage. "This legislation could throw women and children into the streets. If there are no housing alternatives, where's the Government going to put them?" Shelters across the province are either full or do not exist. It is one thing for the Government to say it will find alternative housing—it's another to actually find it.

"We all want safer communities," says Murdoch, "but with this bill, it's not clear how the Government is going to protect vulnerable people, like women and children. Where are the social supports to deal with the people who'll be pushed out of their homes?"

Community groups are also concerned about how easily this legislation could be abused. "People can use SCAN to harass each other, landlords can evict tenants they want to get rid of... this legislation bypasses other legislation that is designed to protect people from harassment and unfair eviction," cautions Sheehan.

The Provincial Advisory Council also questions whether or not it will actually make communities safer. The Minister of Justice himself admits he is not sure of the scope of the problem. As the *Western Star* reported, "Osborne could not say exactly how big a problem the new law is targeted at addressing" (Thursday, May 31, 2007).

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