



Abortion Rights  
Coalition of Canada

*Your Voice for Choice*

Coalition pour le droit à  
l'avortement au Canada

*Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group*

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For immediate release

November 23, 2011

## **PEI Violating Law and Endangering Women By Not Providing Abortions on Island**

CHARLOTTETOWN: The Prince Edward Island government's policy to not provide abortion services on the Island is illegal, says the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC). In a letter the group wrote to PEI's Health Minister Doug Currie on Friday, the coalition stated that "not providing abortion services in PEI violates women's constitutional rights, discriminates against women, and endangers their health and lives. It also contravenes the *Canada Health Act*."

"Minister Currie has been acting like he has the personal prerogative to deny women the right to abortion services on the Island, but he is actually violating federal law," said Joyce Arthur, Executive Director of ARCC. "He has no right to make or enforce any decision that is illegal. We wrote Minister Currie to urge him to comply with the law by providing funded abortion services on the Island, which would ensure that women's rights, health, and dignity are respected."

Arthur explained that Canada's Supreme Court decision in the Morgentaler case struck down the abortion law in 1988 because its arbitrary restrictions harmed women's health and well-being, violating women's constitutional rights to bodily security, life, liberty and conscience. "Requiring women to travel off-Island, even if the procedure itself is funded, fails as an acceptable alternative because young, poor or disadvantaged women don't have the resources to travel. These women are being discriminated against," said Arthur.

"Further, by not making the procedure available, the province is violating pretty much every core principle of the *Canada Health Act*, which guarantees comprehensiveness and accessibility of insured healthcare services." Every province and territory has deemed abortion to be a medically required procedure that must be funded, including PEI. But women needing abortions in PEI are left out of the system because they must leave the province and pay for part or all of the costs themselves. Although PEI pays for the service for women who can travel to Halifax, it imposes permission requirements, travel requirements, and associated expenses. These hardships discriminate against PEI women, especially those who are more marginalized, such as youth, migrants, and low-income women.

Dr. Colleen MacQuarrie, Associate Professor in the Psychology Department at the University of PEI, has been outspoken on this issue. MacQuarrie, who is also a member of ARCC, has been working on a research project documenting the negative health impacts of PEI's abortion policies. She found that without access to abortion services, some women turn to desperate and

To: Honourable Doug Currie, PEI Health Minister

dangerous measures to terminate their pregnancies, risking their physical and mental well-being. For example, Dr. MacQuarrie has related in the media the story of a 14-year-old who “found herself pregnant and was desperate to not even tell anyone she was pregnant and so engaged in two weeks of intense self-harm, ingesting different chemicals, just doing anything she could to bring on a period. She couldn't go to the gym because her body was so horribly bruised.” Stories like this show the desperate lengths to which women will go when abortion services aren't available.

“The Health Minister is also pretending that the province can't afford to add abortion services because the province is cash-strapped, and he even compared abortion to expensive and complex treatments like heart surgery. Such statements are misinformed and even offensive,” said Arthur. “PEI is already paying for women to have abortions in Halifax.” In addition, as ARCC's letter to Currie explained:

- All hospitals in Canada provide treatment for women suffering from miscarriage, which involves the same procedures and equipment as for abortion, so PEI hospitals already have the necessary resources in place.
- Abortion is a very simple, safe, and inexpensive procedure if women have access to it within 15 weeks of conception.
- Childbirth is far more expensive than abortion and the costs of raising unwanted children are prohibitive. Underprivileged women in PEI who are forced to carry to term often require government aid and social services to help provide for unplanned children.

In Dr. MacQuarrie's words: “It is absolutely unacceptable that in 2011, women in PEI are still being denied control over their own bodies and lives and being denied the access to a service provided throughout the rest of Canada.”

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