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CANADA

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POUR LES FEMMES

YWCA Canada opposes Bill C-484: The Biggest Threat to Reproductive Choice in Canada in over 20 years

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YWCA Canada, the country's oldest and largest women's multi-service organization, strongly opposes Bill C-484, a private member's bill called "The Unborn Victims of Crime Act," which passed Second Reading in Parliament on March 5 and is now under review by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. The Bill seeks to amend the Criminal Code to grant a type of legal personhood to fetuses (which are non-persons under the law), posing a serious danger to abortion rights, the rights of all pregnant women, and women's equality rights in Canada.

At first glance, the Bill seems to represent a compassionate response to the tragic murders of pregnant women, but it carries with it serious threats to the rights of women while not significantly addressing the issue of violence against them. It is obvious that if legal personhood status is granted to fetuses, it will be easier to re-criminalize abortion.

"Women in Canada fought long and hard for the decriminalization of abortion," says Paulette Senior, YWCA Canada Chief Executive Officer. "Despite this major victory, access to abortion remains elusive for many women, and we face ongoing threats of re-criminalization. Bill C-484 is not an effective way to address violence against women, including violence against pregnant women. Legislative reform to reduce the rate of violence against women, including homicide, must focus on the woman and not the fetus if it is to be effective."

The Bill would see separate homicide charges laid in the death of a fetus when a pregnant woman is attacked. By legally separating a pregnant woman from her fetus, the Bill creates an adversarial relationship between them as well as one in which fetal rights are elevated above women's rights. Moreover, it could also criminalize pregnant women for behaviour perceived to harm their fetuses, which is widely recognized by women's advocates as an opportunity to re-criminalize abortion. The Bill represents unconstitutional infringements on women's rights, and would likely result in harms against pregnant women.

Despite the protestations of its proponent, Conservative MP Ken Epp, who has a known anti-choice voting record, the Bill lays the groundwork to reopen the door to re-criminalize abortion by giving legal personhood to fetuses. “Granting fetuses any legal personhood would necessarily compromise women’s established rights under the Criminal Code and hamper the gains made to reproductive choice in this country over the last 20 years,” says Senior.

As the largest provider of shelter to women Canada, we know that violence against women often increases during pregnancy. We are saddened and horrified by the increasing numbers of pregnant women murdered by men who claim to love them each year. We urge all MPs to oppose this Bill in Parliament and advocate instead for more resources to reduce violence against pregnant women and women everywhere.

About YWCA Canada:

YWCA Canada is the country’s largest women’s multi-service organization. With 34 Member Associations operating in more than 400 districts and communities across the country, our Turning Point Programs for Women™ - which address personal safety, economic security and well-being - reach 1 million women and girls in nine provinces and one territory. YWCA is the largest national provider of shelter to women, serving 25,000 women, children and teen girls including 6,000 fleeing woman abuse each year. We are the largest provider of literacy, life skills, employment and counselling programs in the country, and the second largest provider of childcare services. YWCA Canada is a member association of the World YWCA which unites 25 million women and girls worldwide and spans 125 countries. For more information about YWCA Canada and our Member Associations, visit www.ywacacanada.ca.

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