

Thank Elder Rose Auger for her prayer and for her blessing of the room.

Thank you Elder Helen Gladue for your comments.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is an umbrella organization representing 41 women's shelters in Alberta – these shelters are in urban and rural areas as well as on reserve. There is a tremendous demand for shelter services: last year shelters provided safe accommodation for **6,126** women and **5,786** children; assisted over **34,000** callers on crisis lines and were unable to accommodate **4,032** abused women and **3,328** children because of a lack of space. So shelters are extremely busy places that not only provide safety for women seeking shelter, but a host of other services as well: a crisis line for those in need, child support programs for children exposed to family violence, safety planning, advocacy for women and children, outreach and public education to name but a few.

In particular, I would like to thank the media for your presence here today to help make known a terrible injustice that is faced by women seeking shelter and those working in women's shelters on reserve.

We are here today to bring to light a fundamental lack of fairness and equality for First Nations Women in Alberta. It compromises their fundamental right to security of person and through years of neglect, First Nations Shelters continue to be severely under-funded.

When we look at Family Violence in Alberta, we know that Alberta has a higher proportion of cases involving domestic violence against women than any other province

-Canadian Institute for Health Information Report (September 2003)

and that Alberta's rates for spousal homicide are significantly higher than the Canadian average.

We also know from a recently released study from Indian & Northern Affairs Canada that three quarters of participants in their study stressed the importance of domestic violence and intervention as their first priority.

Last January, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters undertook a review of funding issues for First Nations Shelters. What we found was alarming – and revealed discriminatory funding practices for First Nations Shelters in comparison with provincially funded shelters.

You need to know that provincially funded women's shelters are also under-funded – however when you compare the provincial funding model with federal funding received by First Nations Shelters there is a terrible injustice. First Nations shelters in comparison to their provincially funded counterparts, are under-funded by over 1 million dollars. Since that study was done, the province has added an additional position (an outreach follow-up position) which creates an even greater discrepancy (close to another ¼ million dollars).

COSTS	PROVINCIAL MODEL	CURRENT LEVEL
STAFFING COSTS	396,244.80	
FACILITY COSTS	18,750.00	
OPERATING COSTS	24,987.50	
ADMINISTRATION	34,743.75	
MAINTENANCE	10,000.00	
TOTAL CORE FUNDING	\$484,726.05	\$282,000
SHELTER SHORTCHANGED:	\$202,726	

When you look at shelter staffing, the pressures placed upon them is significant: be aware that shelters operate round the clock; and the family violence does not take week-ends off:

First Nations

Shelter

1 Executive Director
 1 Administrative Assistant
 4 Crisis Counsellors
 6 Full time workers

Provincial

1 Executive Director
 1 Administrative Assistant
 1 Child Support Worker
 6 Crisis Counsellors
 1 outreach/follow-up worker
 10 full time workers

ACWS

1 Executive Director
 1 Administrative Assistant
 1 Program Co-ordinator
 1.5 Child Support Worker
 7.25 Crisis Counsellors
 1 Maintenance/ Housekeeping position
 2.1 Family Violence Prevention Workers
 14.85 full time workers

There are also other major challenges:

Shortage of affordable housing and support for women leaving shelters (1st Nations Women have limited access to on reserve housing – in fact in the case of marriage breakdown women on reserve to not have the same legal rights or access to the same legal remedies as women who live off a reserve. Women have to leave their matrimonial home and in some cases, because of the severe lack of housing, leave the reserve, the friends, their family to escape the violence)

Barriers in the legal and justice systems

Need for more education for all service providers

Transportation to safety from remote locations

On top of this, first nations shelters are more isolated; face higher food costs and transportation costs, and sometimes even having internet access and cell phones for women's and staff safety can be a problem.

Indian and Northern Affairs needs to stop studying the problem and address it! – they have been looking at this issue for over a decade

We are calling for immediate parity with provincially funded shelters and

By January 1, 2006 there be an adequately funded 1st Nations shelter program, which includes crisis lines, outreach, follow-up, safe visitation, second stage housing and public education

Just this week, I received a package from Justice Canada, marking 20 years for Section 15, the equality rights provision of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In it, the Minister of Justice says that protecting and promoting equality is fundamental to the pursuit of justice, that discrimination against any individual or group diminishes us all; that equality is an organizing principle for the establishment of a just society in which every person is deserving of equal respect and consideration. The women seeking shelter and the women working in shelters deserve equal treatment. And they deserve it now!

In pursuing parity for First Nations Shelters, we were indeed fortunate to receive unanimous support for the Chiefs of Treat 6, 7 and 8, who recognize how important it is to ensure fair treatment for First Nations Shelters.

I would now like to call upon Vice Grand Chief Rose Laboucan to bring comments on behalf of Alberta Chiefs. Rose is

We are joined by a number of chiefs who are here to lend their support to First Nations Women Shelters. I would now like to call upon

- Chief George L. Minde,
 - Joyce Badger on behalf of Chief Fred Badger
- to say a few words.

I would now like to introduce to you a very special person, who is speaking on behalf of four other amazing women– the Executive Directors of First Nations Shelters. These women are true leaders; who lead by example, who are there for women and children seeking safety; who overcome enormous barriers on a daily basis. They are all here today: Janet Gladue, Bigstone Cree Nation Women' s Shelter in Wabasca; Dorothy Sam, Eagles Nest Stoney Family Shelter in Morley, Jean Lapine who has come all the way from Fort Chipewyan; Mikisew Cree Nation Paspew House, and Sandra Ermineskin, from Ermineskin women's shelter, from Maskwaci (which is more commonly known by its Dutch name and the four nations from Hobbema)

This week, we have been paying tribute to Harold Cardinal, who was a leader from Sucker Creek who made a tremendous difference for First Nations people. Therefore, it is no surprise that a proactive

response in addressing social issues of violence against women has come from Sucker Creek. Chief Fred Badger has attended many of our meetings and Kathy Bellerose, the Executive Director of the Sucker Creek Women's Shelter has been asked to speak on behalf of the shelter directors to you today. Kathy.....

I would also like to call upon other representatives that have joined us today:

- Rod Hunter, Bearspaw First Nations Councillor
- Willy Courtioreille, Mikisew Cree First Nation Councillor

Before concluding, I would like to acknowledge the support we have received from the Government of Alberta. We met with the Hon. Pearl Calahasen, who has provided financial support to assist the First Nations Shelters in the quest for parity; and we have also received a message from the Hon. Heather Forsyth, which is included in your press package. She recognizes the importance of providing high quality on reserve emergency shelter and support services for First Nation women and children facing family violence.

We also have a number of important guests: first members of our panel from the 5 First Nations, that I would like to introduce at this time:

Clara Moberly, Bigstone Cree Nation Councillor, Wabasca

Solomon Yellowknee, Board Member, Bigstone Cree Nation,
Wabasca

Rod Hunter, Bearspaw First Nation Councillor & Board Member of
Eagles's Nest Stoney Family Shelter, Morley

Willy Courtioreille, Mikisew Cree First Nation Councillor, Fort
Chipewyan

Gerry Ermineskin, First Nation Councillor, Ermineskin Nation in the
audience today Maurice Tougas, MLA.