



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS HAVE POWER TO INVADE THE SANCTUARY OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS!**

As of today the Canadian Border Services Agency has given Immigration Officials the green light to enter women's shelters and apprehend women they suspect to be illegal immigrants. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters would like to emphasize that law enforcement officers will need a warrant to access a women's shelter unless consent is given.

Jan Reimer, the Provincial Coordinator of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters says "We want to reinforce that all women, including immigrant women and women who are trafficked need the safe haven offered by Alberta's women's shelters."

Shelters are dedicated to keeping women safe from violence and maintaining their confidentiality. That is their mandate and it is the mandate of all services working to end violence against women. Women's rights need to be protected and actions must comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. "All women, no matter where they come from, have the same rights when they are in Canada and should have access to the same services and supports as all of us", says Reimer. Shelters provide services for all women regardless of their immigration status and work to prevent their re-victimization.

Services will need to make decisions about how they can do that to protect women while trying to sort out with CBSA those situations that require it.

Women who enter shelters are seeking a safe-haven from beatings, emotional warfare and destruction, as well as financial and economic abuse. "We need to be extra sensitive to the needs of women who are trafficked and women whose immigration status is wielded as a weapon by their abusive partner", says Jan Reimer, adding "we are also greatly concerned about the welfare of their children".

ACWS questions what advantage there could possibly be for CBSA to put women's shelters under surveillance. Jan Reimer worries of the impact this could have: "we are concerned surveillance practices could be intimidating for all shelter residents and staff".

Women who could be affected by this policy are already innocent victims of abuse targeted by their partners who wield the power of a sponsor as a weapon.

We understand this is a very complex issue, yet we have a responsibility to protect women who come to shelters to seek refuge and protection from their abusive husbands or partners. ACWS calls upon the Canadian Government to have a consultative process to address these issues. Our colleagues in Ontario (Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses) had begun such a process and we were looking forward to building on the results of their work, however, this was pre-empted by the release of the CBSA's National Directive.

For more information, please contact:

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