



The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau,
The Honourable Arif Virani,
The Honourable Pierre Poilievre,
The Honourable Jagmeet Singh,
The Honourable Yves-François Blanchet,

We write to you as feminist and equality-seeking organizations to urge you to take action to address a crisis of dramatic proportions in our family justice system: the use of **parental alienation accusations against victims of domestic violence**.

The controversial theory of “parental alienation” is used to **silence parents and children who report family violence**. Too often, courts and custody evaluators consider that reporting family violence or asking for reduced contact between the father and the child are signs of “alienation”, that is, brainwashing by the mother to make the child reject the father. This concept is leading courts across the country to separate children from their mother and force minors, against their will, to live with their father – even when there is a documented history of family violence. In some cases where the father is found unable to care for the child, courts and child protection will go as far as to place the child in a group home or foster home to avoid the mother’s so-called alienation, even though the child could have stayed with their mother or be taken care of by maternal grandparents. These problems also affect members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community who experience domestic violence.

Canadian research has revealed that:

- **“Parental alienation” accusations are primarily made against women, with victims of intimate partner violence being particularly at risk.**¹
- In 2015, more than half of workers in women’s shelters in Quebec described “parental alienation” accusations as either a priority for their shelter or one of their primary concerns.²

¹ Suzanne Zaccour, “Parental Alienation in Quebec Custody Litigation” (2018) 59:4 *Les Cahiers de droit* 1073–1111 at 1084; Linda C Neilson, *Parental alienation empirical analysis: child best interests or parental rights?* (FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 2018) at 8.

² Simon Lapierre & Isabelle Côté, “Abused women and the threat of parental alienation: Shelter workers’ perspectives” (2016) 65 *Children and Youth Services Review* 120–126.

- The situation has only worsened in recent years as “parental alienation” accusations have become increasingly normalized.³
- In cases where “parental alienation” is alleged, family violence allegations are rarely treated seriously; judges properly consider intimate partner violence as relevant to the child’s best interests in only 10% of cases where both intimate partner violence by the father and “parental alienation” by the mother are alleged.⁴
- Accusations of “parental alienation” are highly correlated with situations of domestic violence, even though this is not always apparent due to the disappearance or silencing of domestic violence concerns from legal cases where “parental alienation” is alleged.⁵
- “Parental alienation” does not have a consistent definition in legal terms: it is a vague concept that can be used in a broad range of circumstances, including cases where the child does not reject a parent and cases where the mother has not denigrated the father and has not obstructed contact with him.⁶
- Due to the prevalence of “parental alienation” accusations against victims of domestic violence, **some mothers are advised by their own lawyers not to tell the courts about the father’s violence.**⁷
- Considering “parental alienation” leads courts to lose sight of the child’s best interests, and to focus on parental rights instead.⁸

Additionally, while Canadian data is limited, research from other countries suggest that parental alienation accusations have a disproportionate impact on women from minority groups, including racialized, migrant, and disabled women⁹.

In 2019, the *Divorce Act* was amended to give more importance to family violence and to direct courts to prioritize children’s safety and wellbeing. As women’s rights organizations, service providers, legal organizations, and research centres, we see that the problem of parental alienation accusations persists. Further reform is needed to explicitly ban the use of parental alienation accusations in family disputes, through an amendment to the *Divorce Act*. Change is

³ Simon Lapierre et al, “The legitimization and institutionalization of ‘parental alienation’ in the Province of Quebec” (2020) 42:1 *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 30–44.

⁴ Elizabeth Sheehy & Susan B Boyd, “Penalizing women’s fear: intimate partner violence and parental alienation in Canadian child custody cases” (2020) 42:1 *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 80–91.

⁵ Suzanne Zaccour, “Does Domestic Violence Disappear from Parental Alienation Cases? Five Lessons from Quebec for Judges, Scholars, and Policymakers” (2020) 33:2 *Canadian Journal of Family Law* 301–357.

⁶ Zaccour, *supra* note 1.

⁷ Joanna Radbord & Deborah Sinclair, “In Children’s Best Interests: Addressing Intimate Partner Violence in Parenting Cases” (2021) 34:12 *Ontario Family Law Reporter* 153 at 156.

⁸ Neilson, *supra* note 1.

⁹ *Custody, violence against women and violence against children*, by Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) at para 44.

particularly urgent given the rise of gender-based violence since the COVID-19 pandemic, leading the Mass Casualty Commission to declare gender-based violence an epidemic.¹⁰

Last summer, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, its Causes and Consequences, Reem Alsalem, presented a report on “Custody, violence against women and violence against children”. She raised the alarm on the “ways in which family courts in different regions refer to ‘parental alienation’ or similar pseudo-concepts in custody cases, ignoring histories of domestic violence, which may lead to the double victimization of victims of such violence.”¹¹ Her first recommendation is that **States must “legislate to prohibit the use of parental alienation or related pseudo-concepts in family law cases”**.¹²

We ask that you commit to following this recommendation and adopt a bill amending the *Divorce Act* as quickly as possible. We also ask that you commit to consulting with expert women’s rights organizations, such as the National Association of Women and the Law, in drafting the bill.

Over 250 number of feminist organizations from across Canada have signed this open letter and endorsed the National Association of Women and the Law’s campaign to ban parental alienation accusations.

If you want to support women, children, and victims of family violence, we hope that you will see that this issue is a priority.

Our family justice system is in crisis, and the time to act is now.



Tiffany Butler, Executive Director



Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs

National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL)

¹⁰ Mass Casualty Commission, *Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission, Volume 3: Violence* (Nova Scotia: The Mass Casualty Commission, 2023) at 268.

¹¹ Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem, *supra* note 9 at para 2.

¹² *Ibid* at para 74.

SIGNATORIES

National organizations

Women's Shelters Canada | Hébergement femmes Canada
Canadian Women's Foundation
Ending Violence Association of Canada | L'Association canadienne pour mettre fin à la violence
DisAbled Women's Network of Canada | Réseau d'action des femmes handicapées du Canada (DAWN-RAFH)
The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies | L'Association canadienne des Sociétés Elizabeth Fry
Grupo de Apoio a Mulheres Brasileiras no Exterior (GAMBE)
Centre for the Study of Social and Legal Responses to Violence
The Alliance of Canadian Research Centres on Gender-Based Violence
Feminist Alliance for International Action
Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) | Centre canadien de ressources pour les victimes de crimes
In Their Best Interest Canada | Dans Leur Intérêt Supérieur Canada
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak | Women of the Métis Nation
Women's Centre for Social Justice (WomenatthecentrE)
YWCA Canada
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) | L'Institut canadien de recherches sur les femmes (ICREF)
Wisdom2Action
Informed Opinions | Femmes Expertes
Aura Freedom
Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE)
Women's Economic Council | Le Conseil économique des femmes
Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDÉACF) |
Prochainement Co-Savoir
Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada | Coalition pour le droit à l'avortement au Canada
Alliance against Violence and Adversity (AVA)

Quebec

Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale
Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes (FMHF)
Table de concertation du mouvement des femmes de la Mauricie (TCMFM)
Réseau des Tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec (RTRGFQ)
Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les violences à caractère sexuel (RQCALACS)
Groupe des Treize
Fédération des associations de familles monoparentales et recomposées du Québec
L'R des centres de femmes du Québec
Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale (Afeas)
Fédération du Québec pour le planning des naissances
Service d'Entraide Passerelle (SEP)
Maison d'Hébergement Pour Elles Des Deux Vallées
Regroupement des femmes de la région de Matane
Femmes en Mouvement
Pavillon Marguerite de Champlain
Regroupement des femmes La Sentin'Elle
Le Gîte Ami
Maison La Virevolte
Alliance des communautés culturelles pour l'égalité dans la santé et les services sociaux (ACCÉSSS)
Centre de femmes l'Étincelle
Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes (RQASF)
Centre des Femmes de Montréal-Est/Pointe-aux-Trembles
Centre de prévention des agressions de Montréal CPAM
Observatoire Famille Immigration
ESPACE Mauricie
Halte-Femmes Montréal-Nord
Action Travail des Femmes (ATF)
Quartier des Femmes
Face a Face Listening and Intervention Center | Le centre d'écoute et d'intervention Face à Face
Jeunesse au Soleil | Sun Youth Organization
Centre social d'aide aux immigrants (CSAI)
Réseau d'action des femmes en santé et services sociaux (RAFSSS)
Centre d'éducation et d'action des femmes de Montréal (CEAF)
CALACS Trêve pour Elles
Multi-Femmes Inc.
Alternative pour Elles maison d'aide et d'hébergement pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale et leurs enfants
Horizon pour elle
Maison le Prélude

La Clé sur la Porte
Maison de Lina
La Maison La Nacelle
Maison d'Hébergement l'Équinoxe
La Bouée Régionale
Centre de solidarité lesbienne (CSL)
La Gîtée
Regroupement des organismes ESPACE du Québec (ROEQ)
La Méridienne 1990
Havre l'Éclaircie
Maison Halte-Secours
Viol-Secours, CALACS de Québec
South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC), Montreal I Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques (CCFSA)
Centre des femmes Le point d'ancrage
Fédération des femmes du Québec
ESPACE Suroît
Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal (TGFM)
Conseil des Montréalaises
L'Autre-Toit du KRTB
Auberge de l'Amitié Roberval inc.
L'Escale de l'Estrie
Juripop
CALACS L'Ancrage
Carrefour d'éducation populaire de Pointe-Saint-Charles
Maison des femmes des Bois-Francis
L'Écho des femmes de la Petite Patrie
Association des familles monoparentales et recomposées La Source
Centre des Femmes du Témiscouata (CFT)
Regroupement des auberges du cœur du Québec (RACQ)
Bureau de consultation jeunesse (BCJ)
La Débrouille Inc.
Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges
Centre des femmes RDP
Centre Actu-Elle
Centre-Femmes La Passerelle
La Collective des femmes de Nicolet et Régions
CALACS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île
Le Centre Louise-Amélie
La Maison des Femmes Sourdes de Montréal (MFSM)
Le Centre féminin du Saguenay
Centre Femmes aux 4 Vents
Centre Femmes Entre-Elles

Transit 24

Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail (CIAFT)

Éditions du remue-ménage

Le Centre de femmes l'Érige

Centre des femmes de Longueuil

La Marie Debout, centre d'éducation des femmes

Centre ressources pour femmes de Beauport

Centre de femmes La Moisson

Regroupement Naissances Respectées (RNR)

Le Regroupement des Femmes de la Côte-de-Gaspé

Y des femmes de Montréal | YWCA Montreal

Centre de femmes Uni-Vers-Elles

Centre de femmes l'Éclaircie

Afrique au Féminin

Centre de femmes Arc-en-ci-Elle

Centre des femmes de Longueuil

Centre de femmes l'Autonomie en soiE

Centre femmes de La Mitis

Centre femmes d'aujourd'hui

Centre-femmes Catherine-Leblond

Centre de femmes Mieux-Être de Jonquière

Centre de Femmes l'Essentielle

Centre des femmes de Forestville

L'Alliance des femmes

Centre-femmes du Grand-Portage

Le Centre des femmes de Laval (CFL)

Mouvement pour l'autonomie dans l'enfantement

Centre-Femmes La Jardilec

Centre de femmes les Unes et les Autres

Centre Entre-Femmes

Centre Au Cœur des Femmes

Fédération régionale des OSBL d'habitation de la Mauricie-Centre-du-Québec (FROHMCQ)

Centre des femmes l'Héritage

Centre des Femmes du Ô Pays

Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs

Conseil Central Cœur du Québec CSN

Centre-Femmes de Bellechasse

Ontario

Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH)
Hope 24/7
Centre Victoria pour femmes
YWCA Hamilton
Interval House of Ottawa | Maison Interval d'Ottawa
Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre
Elizabeth Fry Society of Northeastern Ontario
YW Kitchener-Waterloo
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
Hiatus House
YWCA Durham
Rexdale Women's Centre
Gillian's Place
Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and Families
YWCA Muskoka
North York Women's Centre
Nellie's
YWCA Hamilton
YWCA Toronto
Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services
Huron Transition Homes
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
Elliot Lake Women's Group Inc.
Armagh House
Lennox and Addington Interval House
Manitoulin Family Resources
Birchway Niagara
Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre
YWCA Cambridge
YWCA Ontario Coalition
Alternatives for Women
Herizon House
Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke
YWCA Sudbury
Counselling and Family Service Ottawa | Service familial et counseling Ottawa
YWCA Niagara Region
Kenora Sexual Assault Centre
YWCA Peterborough Haliburton

Red Door Family Shelter
The 482 Collective
York Region Centre for Community Safety
North Bay Indigenous Hub
Conseil Scolaire Public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario (CSPNE)
Embrave: Agency to End Violence
Amelia Rising Sexual Violence Support Centre
Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women
Planned Parenthood Toronto (PPT)
The Niagara Chapter of Native Women Inc.
Community Counselling Centre of Nipissing

Alberta

Calgary Legal Guidance Society
WINGS of Providence
Rowan House Society
RESOLVE Alberta
Fairview & District Women's Centre Association OAS Crossroads Resource Centre & Women's Shelter
Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association
Alberta Abortion Access Network
Neepinise Family Healing Centre
Women's Centre of Calgary
Peace River Regional Women's Shelter
YWCA Edmonton
Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society

British Columbia

Justice for Girls
West Coast LEAF Association
FREDA Centre on Gender-based Violence against Women and Children
Sooke Transition House Society
Omineca Safe Home Society
BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH)
Cowichan Women Against Violence
The Cridge Centre for the Family
North Island Community Services Society
Inform'Elles

Saskatchewan

Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS)
Yorkton Women In Need Inc.
Regina Transition House
Choose to Change - SIGN (Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbours)
Saskatoon Interval House
Amakon Women Empowerment Inc (AWE)
Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan
YWCA Saskatoon
YWCA Regina Inc
YWCA Prince Albert
Regina and Area Sexual Assault Centre

Nova Scotia

The Court Said Canada
Women Centres Connect
Be the Peace Institute
Naomi Society
Tri-County Women's Centre
The Marguerite Centre Society of Nova Scotia
YWCA Halifax
Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
The Women's Place Resource Centre (WPRC)

Manitoba

Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters (MAWS)
RESOLVE Manitoba
Willow Place
S.H.A.D.E. (Safe Housing And Directed Empowerment) Inc. (SHADE Inc.)
Swan Valley Crisis Centre

New Brunswick

Elizabeth Fry New Brunswick (EFryNB)
Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research | Centre Muriel McQueen
Fergusson pour la recherche sur la violence familiale
Valley Outreach
YWCA Moncton

Yukon

Yukon Status of Women Council
Dawson Women's Shelter / Dawson Shelter Society
Yukon Women's Coalition
The Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network (NAWN)
Nain Transition House Inc.
YWCA St. John's

Prince Edward Island

Women's Network PEI
PEI Family Violence Prevention Services Inc.
Blooming House Women's Shelter Inc.

Northwest Territories

YWCA NWT