

National Association of
Women and the Law



Association nationale
Femmes et Droit

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**NAWL Presentation to the
Standing Committee on the Status of Women
On the Impact of the Changes to the Women's program**

By Andrée Côté
December 6, 2006

The recent changes to the Terms and Conditions of the Women's Program will have a disastrous impact on the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), and it will most probably force its closure as of September 2007.

Founded in 1974, NAWL is a feminist non-profit organization that works through law reform in Canada to achieve substantive equality and the realization of human rights for all women. NAWL achieves its mission through research, meetings, conferences and consultations with women across the country, and in collaboration with other women's equality-seeking organizations. Concrete public policy solutions that take the needs of diverse women into consideration and lay the groundwork for egalitarian legislative reforms to meet Canada's constitutional and international commitments are developed through these consultative processes. NAWL is repeatedly called upon to present before parliamentary committees, and remains committed to providing expert legal advice, supported by knowledge of the practical realities of all women.

Over the past 32 years, NAWL has worked on a wide range of issues that directly impact on women's equality rights, including:

- reform of the Divorce Act as concerns issues of custody and access;
- the impacts of faith based-arbitration in family law;
- the matrimonial property rights of Aboriginal women living on Reserve;
- maternity and parental benefits for women living outside of Québec;
- implementation of federal pay equity obligations;
- the discriminatory impact of immigration law and regulations;
- the protection of the human rights of transgendered women;
- gender budgeting;
- women's political participation in democratic institutions;
- implementation of Canada's CEDAW and CESCRC obligations.

The new terms and Conditions of the Women's Program expressly prohibit funding for research, advocacy and lobbying. In addition, the new mandate has eliminated the department's commitment to achieving equality for women. Moreover, it limits funding to groups that pursue activities related to the "participation" of women in the social, cultural and economic fields.

These changes deny the importance of women's full participation in legal and political debates at the heart of democratic decision-making across Canada. Most of NAWL's work flows from research, popular legal and political education on women's equality rights, and advocacy of practical law reform solutions in the political arena to

ensure that the needs and realities facing all women in Canada and Quebec are known to parliamentarians.

Under the new Terms and Guidelines, NAWL's pivotal work in these areas will no longer qualify for support, despite being consistent with the goals of the federal government body formally responsible for advancing women's equality. It is almost assured that NAWL will have to close its doors, because we will fall outside the new funding criteria.

Although we are actively exploring alternative funding sources and developing a fundraising campaign, it will be impossible for NAWL to raise sufficient funds to become self-sustaining in the very short time-frame that lies ahead. Moreover, NAWL is only one of numerous equality-seeking women's organizations that are suddenly engaged in fundraising efforts to replace the financial short-fall caused by the new funding criteria.