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Charitable Reg. #: 108227927 RR0001

April 27, 2016

Honourable Kathleen Ganley
Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
424 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Delivered via email

Dear Minister Ganley,

Re: Letter of Support for Bill 9 Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences

On behalf of the YWCA of Calgary, I am writing to offer our support for your proposed Bill 9 and the important move to end the practice of issuing warrants for unpaid fines issued as a result of minor infractions. We echo your stance that criminalizing non-violent acts perpetuates a cycle of incarceration and poverty and works against our mission to create a safe, equitable community in which women can thrive.

As the largest and longest-serving women’s organization in Calgary we support many vulnerable women who experience poverty and abuse.

In 2015, more than 6,700 individuals accessed the YWCA, including more than 1,500 women and children who spent at least one night in one of our emergency shelter or housing programs and more than 1,100 women and men who accessed our education and employment programs.

We offer the following comments from women and YWCA frontline staff regarding the circumstances faced by women who face outstanding warrants or fear reporting crimes perpetrated against them as a result of the current warrant legislation.

- “I have been caught shoplifting food and riding the train without paying because I cannot afford it, and then I cannot afford to pay the fines, so they keep piling up,” says a woman residing in a YWCA Community-based supportive housing (Housing First) program.
- “We have women with warrants in our programs who have or are currently experiencing abuse and violence and they refuse to report their offenders and do not want to call the police because they are worried about getting arrested. Violent offenders are walking free and women are not safe,” says a YWCA program supervisor.

Passing this legislation would meaningfully address the circumstances of some individuals who have limited options and see their futures and ability to move forward further curtailed by outstanding warrants.



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Further, recognizing the barriers related to access to justice for many Albertans and particularly those who are vulnerable, we believe this Bill would alleviate pressure on peace officers and court systems.

As with past efforts related to increasing support for women’s shelters, the child benefit and intentions regarding the adjustment to the minimum wage, we believe this move is a laudable demonstration of Government’s commitment to improving conditions for some of our community’s most vulnerable.

I look forward to the opportunity to thank you in person and to share the work of the YWCA of Calgary with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Tomney', written in a cursive style.

Sue Tomney
Chief Executive Officer
YWCA of Calgary

cc: YWCA Board of Directors