



## **Community groups sidelined by funding decision in missing women inquiry**

**May 25, 2011** – Coalition partners Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) and West Coast LEAF are denouncing the government’s decision to ignore the Commissioner’s recommendations and deny funding all community groups in the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry.

“Once again, the rules and processes change and money is saved when women are concerned. We have a ton to offer the process as we represent issues relating to violence against women all across BC, which is the expanded lense the Commission set out for itself,” says EVA BC Executive Director Tracy Porteous (full statement follows). “No one else offers this provincial anti-violence specialized perspective and has done consultation with groups on the matter of murdered and missing women across the entire province, as we have.”

A letter to West Coast LEAF from the AG’s office states that, “The government is of the view that organizations are better situated to fund counsel without assistance from government... than are the victims’ families.”

Alison Brewin of West Coast LEAF replies “so it is either the families or non-profit organizations? Where does the Ministry get its facts? Certainly not from the Affidavits we all filed with the Commissioner. Clearly where women’s rights, women’s lives and safety are at stake, the AG’s department isn’t interested in facts.”

“We absolutely support the provision of full funding for the families, and accept that our involvement and therefore funding will be less than the families’, due to the need for their full participation. But whoever decided that the non-profits can afford legal representation is seriously misinformed,” says Brewin. “Reviewing an anticipated one million documents and possibly two, and participating in six months of inquiry hearings - this is not an amount of time our only lawyers on staff – our ED and Legal Director – can handle. Yet this is the level of involvement necessary if we are to truly hold government accountable for the mistakes it made in dealing with this file. The government is asking private practice lawyers to give up at least half their year’s income to do this pro bono? It’s ridiculous.”

Without external legal expertise representing community organization, the commission staff will be forced to act as the “questioners” or cross-examiners in this matter – which defeats the purpose of a public inquiry.

“Our interest is to ensure that the inquiry focuses on the systemic causes and implications of the botched investigations, in accordance with the Government’s constitutional and international obligations. This funding decision is a blight on the process and another indication of systemic decision-making that undermines and marginalizes women’s participation,” says Porteous

**West Coast LEAF’s mission is to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of systemic discrimination against women through BC-based equality rights litigation, law reform and public legal education.**

**EVA BC works to coordinate and support the work of victim-serving and other anti-violence programs in BC through the provision of issue-based consultation and analysis, resource development, training, research and education.**

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**For more information, please contact:**

Alison Brewin  
Interim Executive Director, West Coast LEAF  
Tel: 604.612.1312

Tracy Porteous  
Executive Director, EVA BC  
Tel: 604.633.2506 ext 10

**Statement from EVA BC Executive Director Tracy Porteous on behalf of EVA BC and West Coast LEAF**

As the list of murdered and missing women in British Columbia continues to grow it is with shock and dismay that we are here, once again, having to fight for women’s interests to be heard.

Foremost, our deepest sympathy to the loved ones of the slain women as they and whole communities, our entire province, are deeply affected by these horrific crimes.

It was our belief that the province set up the Missing Women’s Commission because they too were deeply concerned about how many women are being murdered in BC.

We believed the province was interested in getting answers and making change so that BC could become a safer place for all women.

With respect to the reason we are here today:

- We are glad the families have full funding.
- We accept the move of the Commission to create a two-tiered approach and provide some groups with limited status,
- and we accepted that would mean we would likely have less funding than the families, but to be informed that we and the other groups who were given limited standing get

nothing, is simply unconscionable.

- The Cohen inquiry, into the missing fish, provided funding for in excess of 26 lawyers to be involved representing various perspectives.
- Yet, here we are talking about the deaths and disappearances of hundreds of women and now the province decides to start saving money!
- We and the other groups here have a ton to offer the process.
- We represent violence against women issues all across BC, which is the expanded lense the Commission set out for itself.
- Our contributions are unique, we have been tracking issues, deaths and the link to policy or the lack thereof for many years.
- Whoever made the decision, without even a call to any of us I might add, that the non profits can afford legal representation, is widely misinformed and has no understanding of the status of how funding works for non profits.
- We cannot assist the Commission without funding, full stop.
- Living in a civil society involves everyone having a voice, not just the most powerful. To silence the very groups that pushed for this inquiry and those who work with abused and vulnerable women undermines our most basic expectations of democracy. If the study of missing fish can be fully funded, so too should the study into why so many women are being murdered in our province.