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Chair: Dominique Vien



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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

A cordial welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons' Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, April 23, 2026, the committee will begin its study of women's shelters and transitional housing. For the second hour, we will move in camera for consideration of draft reports.

As always, today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of members and witnesses. We aren't very strict, but some rules do need to be respected.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: either floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

If you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For those on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function.

I would like to remind witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you will need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

A reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I'd now like to welcome the witnesses.

[English]

From Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, we have Andrea Silverstone, chief executive officer. From Shelter Movers, we have Marc Hull-Jacquin, founder and chief executive officer.

[Translation]

Hello, sir. You're here, with us.

[English]

From Women's Shelters Canada, we have Anuradha Dugal, executive director. Welcome.

We will begin with opening statements, and Ms. Silverstone.

Juanita Nathan (Pickering—Brooklin, Lib.): Madam Chair?

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes.

[English]

Juanita Nathan: Before the witnesses proceed, can I please move a motion to appoint a vice-chair?

[Translation]

The Chair: Of course.

[English]

Juanita Nathan: I would like to nominate Marilyn Gladu as the vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: I'll give the floor to the clerk.

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Tina Miller): Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Juanita Nathan: I would like to nominate Marilyn Gladu for the position of vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Thank you. I duly announce Ms. Gladu as first vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: Congratulations, Ms. Gladu.

I'll pick up where I left off.

[English]

Welcome. We will begin with opening statements.

Ms. Silverstone, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Andrea Silverstone (Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society): Thank you so much.

Good morning. My name is Andrea Silverstone. I am the CEO of the Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, which is an agency that works to disrupt the structures of abuse with individuals, organizations and communities across Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to appear before this committee today to discuss housing and shelters in the context of gender-based violence.

There are many important elements of this issue. However, today, I would like to focus specifically on how the current system is structured to respond to women who are leaving abusive relationships and where I think that structure is failing them. My perspective comes from over 20 years as a social worker, working directly with survivors, as well as from research and practice-based evidence.

At its core, our system currently conflates two distinct experiences for women. These are the need for immediate safety from violence and the need for housing stability after leaving abuse. When those needs are treated as the same, the system becomes misaligned and women don't receive the right support at the right time.

Gender-based violence is not a single, uniform experience. We know some women experience ongoing coercive control and are at high risk of serious harm, while others experience violence that does not involve the same level of coercive control but still results in the need to leave their homes. This distinction is critical for policy because it directly shapes what women actually need in order to be safe and rebuild their lives.

Canadian data highlights a clear gap in how we respond. Only a small proportion of women who experience violence access shelters. At the same time, shelters consistently report that a lack of affordable housing is the primary barrier to women leaving shelters, and approximately one-third of women return to an abusive partner because they have no viable housing alternatives.

For women, this is not just a housing issue. It's a safety issue shaped by economic and structural constraints.

At Sagesse, most of the women we work with don't require emergency shelter, but they do experience profound housing disruption as a direct result of the abuse they experience. This includes many women who appear financially secure but still experience financial control or legal abuse. Leaving an abusive relationship often results in a loss of housing, financial instability and disconnection from their community. For these women, the barrier is not access to safety infrastructure. It's access to housing, stability and supports that allow them to move forward into safety.

There are two clearly different groups of women with very different needs. The first group has acute safety needs. It's a smaller group—probably about 6% to 20%—of women who are fleeing vi-

olence and require shelter, confidentiality and intensive supports. The second group experiences what we call displacement-based housing needs. This is made up of the majority of women—about 80% to 90%—and they require rapid access to affordable housing, financial and legal supports and the ability to remain in their communities.

Right now, what we're doing is asking one system, shelters, to serve both of these groups. This has real consequences for women. Women who don't need shelters are being displaced into them because there are no alternatives. Shelters experience overcapacity and longer stays, and women at highest risk may face barriers to accessing safe spaces because they're not available.

This is not just about capacity. It's about a gendered system design issue that limits women's ability to safely leave domestic abuse. Sagesse's work demonstrates that women benefit most from community-based wraparound supports that allow them to remain connected to their communities when it's safe; that address housing, financial, legal and emotional needs together; and that strengthen informal supports, such as friends, family and community networks. For many women, informal supports are central to their long-term stability and safety.

I'd like to propose four key directions for this committee's consideration.

First, preserve and strengthen shelters as critical, specialized safety infrastructure for women who are at highest risk. Second, develop parallel housing pathways for women leaving abuse who do not require emergency shelter, including rapid rehousing and portable housing benefits. Third, invest in community-based wraparound supports, recognizing the importance of informal and peer-based support systems. Fourth, reduce unnecessary disruption, ensuring that women can remain in their homes and communities whenever it is safe to do so.

Gender-based violence creates a spectrum of different needs for women. Evidence clearly shows that only a minority of women require high-security shelter, while the majority of women require housing and stabilization supports to safely leave the abuse. Treating these needs as interchangeable is overwhelming shelters and limiting women's options. A more differentiated, housing-informed approach will improve stability, safety and outcomes for women across Canada.

• (1105)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Silverstone. You stayed within your time limit.

Mr. Hull-Jacquin, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Marc Hull-Jacquin (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Shelter Movers): Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Marc Hull-Jacquin, and I'm the CEO and founder of Shelter Movers - Transit Secours.

As Canada's only free moving and storage service for survivors fleeing abuse, Shelter Movers is pleased to provide its unique perspective and national scope to inform the committee's work, focusing on the three questions in front of you for your study.

For survivors fleeing gender-based violence, Canada's ongoing housing crisis remains a significant and pervasive barrier to achieving autonomy, security and stability on their journey to a better future. Having completed over 10,000 moves for women and children in crisis, Shelter Movers has observed first-hand how a lack of safe, affordable and supportive housing contributes to the myriad of compounding risks and barriers faced by survivors before, during and after violence occurs.

Notwithstanding survivors' varied and unique experiences, safe and stable housing is consistently highlighted as a primary concern when contemplating whether or not to leave an abuser.

To understand the relationship between safe, stable housing and survivors' varied experiences, we must understand the nuanced, complex and often high-stakes calculation many survivors are forced to make in their decision to leave their abuser. Key factors such as social isolation, financial precarity and repeated psychological or physical trauma create an environment where leaving an abuser often feels entirely overwhelming and utterly unimaginable. For a survivor who manages to overcome these and other serious barriers, not knowing where she and her children will live next leads many survivors to conclude that enduring further abuse in the home is preferable to leaving.

Key to many abusive and coercive narratives are two combined messages: that the world is a dangerous place where no one can be trusted, and that the survivor is incapable of succeeding on her own. Safe, stable housing and help to collect and retain one's belongings present survivors with a positive empowering counter-narrative that can often make the difference between leaving and staying in an abusive relationship.

As we know, the data reveals that on average, survivors return to the abusive relationship seven times. By the time many survivors decide to flee, the abuser has taken control of the family finances, social relationships and often the survivor's sense of autonomy and self-worth.

Many of Shelter Movers' clients will have left their abuser at least once. Each time the survivor returns, the notion of leaving feels less and less logistically, financially and emotionally achievable. As the survivor's dependency and isolation deepen, the frequency and severity of violence also tends to increase. As housing costs and living expenses increase, each departure becomes increasingly expensive and out of reach.

Emergency women's shelters and transition homes historically have played a very central role in Canada's social safety net. Shelters and transition homes staff face an enormous pressure to continually innovate to meet the increasingly diverse needs of survivors, and they strive to be as multi-faceted in their operational offerings and capacity as the vastly diverse communities they serve.

In working closely with hundreds of shelters and transition homes across the country over the past 10 years, Shelter Movers has observed the many ways shelters strive to adapt and serve the needs of local communities in crisis with varying degrees of success despite incredible efforts.

Shelter Movers views the ever-increasing financial and administrative demands on shelters and transition homes as unsustainable and untenable given the broad ecosystem of services currently supporting individuals and families experiencing abuse. For too long, shelters and transition homes have borne the burden of attempting to be all things to all survivors. Shelter Movers has observed that, rather than focusing on areas of expertise to maximize effectiveness and impact, shelters and transition homes tend to favour offering a wide range of services despite reduced capacity.

A survivor-centred approach would contrast the needs and priorities of survivor subgroups in a community against the available services in that area. This method focuses on a complete, holistic and community-specific system of care. A survivor service ecosystem that typically comprises over 30 individual organizations is a way of spreading out the responsibility and burden on shelters and transition homes to allow organizations like Shelter Movers to do what they do best in a nuanced, comprehensive and compassionate way.

With better resourcing and coordination of organizations operating within this survivor service ecosystem, including shelters and transition homes, we stand a better chance of generating significantly better outcomes for survivors fleeing abuse, while allowing shelters and transition homes to focus on their primary areas of expertise, depending on their particular community's needs.

Thank you.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hull-Jacquin.

[English]

Ms. Dugal, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[Translation]

Anuradha Dugal (Executive Director, Women's Shelters Canada): I'll read my remarks in English, but I can answer questions in French.

[English]

Good morning, Madam Chair and honourable committee members. Thank you for the invitation.

My name is Anuradha Dugal. I'm executive director of Women's Shelters Canada, Hébergement femmes Canada, bringing together 16 provincial and territorial shelter organizations and supporting over 600 shelters across the country for women, children and gender-diverse people fleeing violence.

We will submit a written brief, including our latest national report published in March, authored by Dr. Robyn Hoogendam and Chika Maduakolam, "Sheltering Under Pressure: Frontline Realities of Canada's Violence Against Women Shelters and Transition Houses", which forms the basis of my remarks.

The main takeaway and the focus of my message is that VAW shelters across Canada are doing more than ever with less and less. Without sustained funding, infrastructure investment and housing solutions, shelters' capacity to support survivors is being stretched.

Rising violence and the housing crisis keep survivors trapped without safe options. In a 2024 report, WSC found that 97% of shelter survey respondents indicated that over the preceding 12 months, it had become harder and harder to support survivors in finding housing. This housing crisis has led to increasingly high turnaway rates. The lack of affordable housing means that shelters help fewer women because of the bottleneck effect of women staying longer in shelter because there's nowhere to go. The high turnaway rates increase the risk of femicide and other long-term harms of returning to an abuser because there is nowhere else to go.

When the system is working with sufficient supports and capacity, shelters and transition houses function as they were meant to, as pathways to safe and affordable housing. In the absence of these options, both emergency and second-stage shelters are extending their length-of-stay policies.

WSC is also running a program that supports new shelter builds as unmet demand leads shelters to consider building new spaces for survivors to live and heal in safety.

There are clear links between housing insecurity, poverty and gender-based violence. Those in shelter are only a small portion of survivors in need. Those who can go elsewhere, such as to family or friends, generally do. Shelters are for those who cannot go anywhere else or who are at increased risk of post-separation violence. Women don't need to move into a shelter to access supports: They can use outreach services for all kinds of services like safety planning, counselling, service navigation and other community organizations.

Poverty and income insecurity are major factors for survivors in shelters. Violence is both a driver of poverty and housing insecurity and a result of being unhoused. Employment can be a protective factor for survivors, as it often offers independence, confidence and social support. Too often, violence follows survivors to work, and employers make the mistake of thinking the effects of violence are other kinds of performance and work issues. You can learn more about this on our website, referher.ca.

Finally, capacity and accessibility of women's shelters across Canada to support vulnerable women and those fleeing violence is at risk. Over half of the surveyed organizations in our newest publication report chronic shortfalls in core operational funding, reflecting stagnant or insufficient government and core funding streams that have not kept pace, especially with rising costs.

Shelters have limited capacity to offer dedicated supports, especially to meet intersectional needs of survivors. In particular, these are limited for Black survivors, as well as two-spirit, trans, gender-diverse, gender-fluid and intersex survivors and survivors with disabilities. Fifty-eight per cent of shelters offer targeted, culturally relevant programming, but these are often under-resourced and cannot fully meet the demand.

The shelter workforce is large, specialized and under intense strain. Turnover, burnout, low pay and the emotional toll of the work remain pervasive.

Our report highlights six recommendations, of which I will underline three today.

Shelters need sustained capital investment in infrastructure.

• (1115)

Survivors need access to affordable—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Dugal.

Anuradha Dugal: May I just finish presenting the two recommendations?

The Chair: Respectfully, to make sure the meeting goes smoothly, I have to refuse. Otherwise, we'll be short on time. I know my colleagues are generous. They'll likely give you an opportunity to finish your thought.

Anuradha Dugal: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now begin with questions.

Ms. Cody, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you.

Through you, Chair, thank you to all the witnesses who came today to speak on the important issue of shelter systems.

I want to address my question to Andrea Silverstone.

Senior women are particularly vulnerable to coercion, control and exploitation, but barriers prevent them from accessing shelters. This abuse can come from family members and caregivers, not intimate partners.

In the government's Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, the definition of coercive control is limited to intimate partners. Should the definition of coercive control be expanded to persons of trust to cover all types of coercion to better support seniors and improve their care and shelter?

• (1120)

Andrea Silverstone: My answer is yes, absolutely.

One of the recommendations that Sagesse made, which I shared when I was able to testify in front of the justice committee, was how that piece of legislation should extend to people who have relationships of dependency and trust. It needs to include seniors as well as many other groups that are experiencing coercive control but not necessarily in intimate partner relationships.

Connie Cody: Thank you.

We know that seniors and elderly people are more likely to struggle with mobility issues. Amid the affordability crisis, more seniors are being pushed into the shelter system.

In your opinion, would you say that the shelter system is equipped to accommodate the unique mobility needs of seniors?

Andrea Silverstone: I would suggest that most are not.

I think that one question I would ask is whether most seniors require sheltering support because of extreme violence or they require sheltering support because of housing. If it's because of a housing issue, then we should be looking at a different solution that accommodates their specific needs as seniors and considers the long-term effects when seniors move out of independent housing and into some sort of assisted housing, which often becomes a permanent situation. What happens next?

I think that we have to offer specialized services that respond to the specific needs of that group of individuals.

Connie Cody: Victims of human trafficking often require unique supports as well to help them recover from the deep trauma and extreme abuse they experienced.

Would you agree that women entering the shelter system who have been trafficked require unique assistance, support and safe spaces to heal and recover? Do you think the current shelter system provides this support?

Andrea Silverstone: I'm so glad you asked this question. This was the work of my master's degree.

I submitted a position paper to the federal ombudsman for victims of crime specifically on this issue. It is available on their website.

The answer is 100% that trafficking victims need very specialized housing supports. Generally speaking, the housing supports that they require are at minimum for two years, which is very different from what women who are fleeing violence require. They have experienced multiple levels of coercive control. Usually there

are histories of childhood abuse, domestic violence, organized crime and gangs. As a result, those trafficking victims require very specialized supports. There are some examples of best practices in Canada that are highlighted in the study that I did for the federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

Connie Cody: I'm hearing from a lot of women in my community. They're saying that they would rather live in their cars than in the current shelter system. They've told me directly that the violence and active drug use that goes on within the shelter system deters them from going to these shelters. This is particularly difficult for women with children who don't want to expose their kids to unsafe environments and for vulnerable seniors.

In your experience, have you seen active drug use and violence within shelters as a barrier for women in these situations?

Andrea Silverstone: The answer is yes, depending on the shelter.

There are women's shelters, and I would suggest that, for the most part, women fleeing violence don't experience that in those shelters. Those aren't the reports that we're hearing.

Women often find themselves in homeless shelters because they are fleeing violence and have housing issues. Yes, those don't feel safe for women. They don't feel safe for people with children.

I would suggest that we have not just a sheltering issue generally but also an issue of safety in shelters that are dedicated for homelessness. These are not shelters that are dedicated for women fleeing violence, but shelters that are dedicated for homelessness, which is often where women fleeing violence end up because the women's shelters are full.

Connie Cody: Studies are showing that when a woman's shelter space is revealed to her intimate partner abuser, particularly when that person has been let out on bail, she begins to feel extremely vulnerable and compromised. The safety of all other women in the shelter may also be put at risk if the offender is aware of the location of the victim.

Is our current justice system, which releases violent offenders on bail, compromising women's safety within shelter spaces across Canada?

Andrea Silverstone: My answer is that I would like to see some bail reform. I would like to see us be stronger in terms of holding perpetrators accountable, especially those who are at risk of reoffending or who have shown themselves to be dangerous. The answer is that we could definitely provide greater supports and greater checks and balances within our system to make sure that women are safer.

Connie Cody: Would you say that bad Liberal policies over the last 10 years are to blame for all of this?

Andrea Silverstone: As someone who is not an expert in this area, I couldn't say to whom to attribute the blame, where it belongs, but I would say that what I would like to see is bail reform. As well, I would like to see that when bail is being offered to perpetrators who are at risk of violent reoffence, that risk is noted and recognized.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Those were your final remarks.

Thank you very much, Ms. Cody.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor for six minutes.

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Welcome to all of the witnesses. Thank you so much for being here.

Our government is doing a renewal of the national housing strategy, looking for consultations on which programs are working well and which ones we should be adding. I'm very interested to talk about the housing issue and what the government should be doing.

I'll start with you, Ms. Silverstone, because you talked about rapid rehousing. Could you give me an idea of whether there is a range of different kinds of housing that you would recommend, or do you have any suggestions in that area?

Andrea Silverstone: I very much like what the individual from Shelter Movers said about following the survivor, so I think we need to have survivor-centred solutions. Rapid rehousing will look different for different survivors, based on the communities they live in, the level of risk they have, and the level of capacity and supports they have.

An example I might give you is a woman of affluence who doesn't have access to her assets right now but at some point will have access to her assets. Rapid rehousing for her might mean that she needs just three to six months of support or even mortgage support during that period of time because she will have stability again financially. For someone who is not in that position, rapid rehousing might look like a move into some sort of long-term housing in community or even longer-term transitional housing in community. Whatever it is, it doesn't have to be an emergency shelter with the whole weight of that system and the expense of that system per se.

I also think it's important that there is funding for housing for survivors that doesn't force them into one part of the system or the other but that recognizes their unique needs.

Marilyn Gladu: That's excellent.

I have the same question for you, Mr. Hull-Jacquin.

Marc Hull-Jacquin: Thank you.

I concur with Ms. Silverstone.

I think our primary goal is to listen to survivors and to focus on their priorities. A system that simplifies the experience of survivors loses the nuance of the threats they're facing and the complexity of their decisions. A housing system that identifies subgroups in a particular community, identifies the services available to those subgroups and then identifies the gap—housing would be one of them in most communities—is the way to start the story with survivors' needs and then respond with policy and funding.

Marilyn Gladu: That's excellent.

Ms. Dugal, you had six recommendations. Are they in the report that you referenced? If not, I would ask you to send them to the clerk.

I have the same question for you: In terms of what the government should be doing in the national housing strategy, what would you recommend?

Anuradha Dugal: Yes, I will send the recommendations in the report.

One I want to mention particularly is the importance of portable housing benefits for women and that those be available immediately. There shouldn't be a wait of a certain period of time that somebody has been named homeless before that person can get those benefits. There are a lot of delays in the system with regard to when benefits can be accessed, and then there is a lot of red tape about who can get them, when and for how long. I agree that the immediate need should be met immediately.

With regard to pathways to ownership, not everybody can own property, but the idea is that poverty and intergenerational poverty will lead to future experiences of violence. It's not just the trauma of the existing violence in a family that leads to that intergenerational impact; it's also long-term poverty. Pathways to ownership for small, accessible homes in safe areas are also essential for survivors so that they can make their own decisions.

Shelters don't offer survivors a lot of autonomy. What we're trying to do is build autonomy, independence and self-determination. That is what more housing options will allow survivors.

Marilyn Gladu: My next question has to do with the age demographic that we're seeing in the shelter system. Does anyone have any data on what percentage of people are seniors? What percentage are young women? Do we have any data on that?

Go ahead, Ms. Dugal.

Anuradha Dugal: Generally, the people who are in shelters are those who are younger, partially because accepting a family into a violence against women shelter is often the priority. The most extreme forms of violence are often experienced by younger women.

Also, there are existing policies that make it very hard for single women, and older women are generally single. They make it very hard for an older woman to find a space in a shelter. There are very limited spaces for older women in shelters. Not to mention that communal living for an older woman is also a very hard situation for her to be in after she's been living by herself and has been autonomous for a very long time.

• (1130)

Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

There's one quick question from my colleague, Ms. Church.

Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be here subbing in today, Madam Chair.

What a great discussion.

My question is for Mr. Hull-Jacquin. The costs of fleeing violence are very real. You've illustrated that moving, storage, upfront relocation costs and being back in an unsafe environment are huge concerns. Your work seems to really fill this gap. How can government better recognize these costs?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. Church, unfortunately I must interrupt you. It's not very nice, but we'll surely have time to get back to it. I'm sorry.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First, I'd like to thank all the witnesses. I'm taking a lot of notes. This is a crucial and significant issue.

As I said yesterday before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the housing issue was the focus of my two-week parliamentary break. So I think we have something very important to study.

Mr. Hull-Jacquin, my question is related to my colleague Mrs. Church's question. Your organization often supports women in highly vulnerable situations. What is the main reason women stay in this cycle of violence? What are the main practical obstacles they face? Is it the fear of homelessness, poverty, immigration or a lack of housing?

Marc Hull-Jacquin: Thank you, Ms. Larouche. I'll answer in English, because I'm more comfortable in English.

[English]

Motivations for survivors to flee abusive relationships are as varied and nuanced as the dynamic or the relationship in which they find themselves. Intersecting demographic components of someone's identity—indigenous women, aged women, women with young children, newcomers to Canada, 2SLGBTQIA and any income level that might overlap on that—will influence the decision that the survivor will make in terms of staying or leaving.

We have served women in homes I will never be able to afford in the nicest neighbourhoods in Canada, we have helped women and children leave buildings I would not qualify as a home or physical building, and we have seen everything in between.

A system that responds and listens to survivors about what they need and when they need it will be the most effective and the most cost-effective.

In terms of the barriers that our organization faces in order to serve more families, it's quite simple. Our job is to listen to survivors and operate where they need us. Shelter Movers currently operates in seven major cities. We move almost 200 families a month. The reason we do this is that organizations like shelters, transition homes, sexual assault centres, victim services and police put their trust in our organization and the 1,000 volunteers who move these families. We do that with compassion. We do that in a survivor-centred way. The barriers to leaving require conversations with survivors and require listening and waiting for their direction. Survivors are the tellers of their own stories, and they're the experts

in their experience. The system that reflects that will meet their needs much more efficiently than any presumption we make about their situation.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I have one last question for you. Try to keep your answer brief.

Human trafficking came up recently. Are traditional resources suited to women who are victims of sexual exploitation or trafficking?

We talked about certain traumas making interventions more complicated. What changes would be necessary?

[English]

Marc Hull-Jacquin: Survivors of sexual assault have experienced a very unique type of violence. As one of the witnesses indicated, there are multiple intersecting layers of oppression, organized crime and potential acts of violence by family members, people close to them or intimate partners. An organization like Shelter Movers does not take into account the type of crime survivors have experienced. Our job is to acknowledge that they're experiencing abuse and get them out of the home as quickly and efficiently as possible.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, I do believe that a system that oversimplifies the experience of survivors will cost our taxpayers more and will serve survivors less well. A system that is shelter-centred as opposed to survivor-centred will also put an undue burden on shelters and transition homes, which are expected to do everything for survivors as best they can. An investment in the survivors' service ecosystem, acknowledging the 30-plus organizations that operate in many communities, is a more cost-effective and more specialized way of responding to the nuanced needs of survivors.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much.

Ms. Silverstone, my colleagues and I have already addressed the issue of funding for organizations. Community organizations are calling for more stable funding and fewer one-off programs. Which funding model would be most useful to ensure the sustainability of services?

[English]

Andrea Silverstone: I think in the best-case scenario, we would be looking at multi-year funding so that organizations can plan appropriately and can plan from a long-term perspective. I think what we ultimately need to be looking at in terms of financing for any organization, or investment in any non-profit organization, is what the needs of the survivors are. The funding should follow the needs of the survivors, first and foremost.

I think it's a combination of that as well as, of course, long-term and multi-year investment. Then, as I think Ms. Dugal stated, there needs to be a living wage, a good wage, for people who do work in this sector, because it is a high-burnout job.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: I have 30 seconds left.

Do you see any specific needs among women in rural areas, indigenous women or women living with mental health or addiction issues? Are you able to identify those needs?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Larouche, but we've run out of time. That's all for now. You'll have an opportunity to come back to it.

I'll now start the second round of questions.

Mrs. Goodridge, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd also like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

[*English*]

I want to start off by thanking all the witnesses. The work you do for such a vulnerable community is remarkable, as is the fact that you do it each and every day. You talked a little bit about the burnout issues. I think that's so critically important to highlight.

Before I was here in Ottawa, I was an MLA in Alberta, where we brought forward Clare's Law.

Ms. Silverstone, your organization is one of the organizations that provide that. Can you explain why Clare's Law has been so important in Alberta's context and exactly what it does?

Andrea Silverstone: Sagesse is actually the organization that was advocating, along with survivors, to bring Clare's Law to Alberta. For many years, we were the ones who were delivering the Clare's Law social service network.

Clare's Law is a "right to know and right to ask" piece of legislation. If somebody is in a relationship where they suspect the partner might have a history of domestic abuse, they can make a request to the police to get that information. The way it used to work was that when they would make a request to the police, an application would also come into Sagesse, where we could provide supports and services with the Clare's Law network. If you're already asking, it means you're already concerned, which means you probably shouldn't be waiting for the police to tell you whether it is high, medium or low. Your spidey senses are already going off, and you need the supports and services. There's also the right to know. If the police do know that somebody has a history of domestic abuse that can put somebody at risk, they have the right to inform survivors, or people who were in abusive relationships, that they might be at risk.

Clare's Law is excellent, but the excellent part of Clare's Law is not necessarily the police disclosure. It is the social support network that comes along with that Clare's Law application. Unfortunately, in Alberta there is not now, in the same way that there was, the social support network. It's now going through a different system. In my opinion, no matter what, there needs to be some sort of social support network response to go along with Clare's Law, be-

cause it's not just about what the police can tell a survivor. That's actually not the defining factor of what helps a survivor and keep themselves and their children safe.

• (1140)

Laila Goodridge: Thank you for that.

Ms. Dugal, there are a number of different women's shelters under the umbrella of Women's Shelters Canada. I know that as each new women's shelter gets built, it brings in new ideas and innovations. The newest women's shelter in my riding of Fort McMurray—Cold Lake is the Stepping Stones shelter. It's in the city of Cold Lake. It has something really innovative, a kennel, so that people who are fleeing violence can bring their pets with them. That had been identified as quite a barrier for many people.

Can you list some of the women's shelters doing exceptional work across this country that we could look to, so that we're not always just looking at the worst situations, but at some of the best of the best?

Anuradha Dugal: I want to point out that the Cold Lake program is one that we supported in our project management program for new builds. We also support pet-ready sheltering to encourage shelters to build spaces exactly like that kennel to welcome domestic animals, which are essential in the healing process.

As for some of the very interesting programs I've seen across the country, in Saskatchewan, I've seen a second-stage shelter called Sophia's Place. It has a relationship with an at-market build to provide apartments for women at zero or minimal cost. Rather than build it themselves, they have worked with a developer to insert themselves into an existing build. I think that's a very interesting model.

Also, many of the new YWCAs across Canada, whether in Vancouver, Regina or here in Montreal, include many new kinds of spaces. They include child care support, so they can run a for-profit model, or at least a not-for-profit model, that increases their funding and offers them a hub environment. Community spaces are very important.

Laila Goodridge: I have a few minutes left.

Ms. Silverstone touched on bail reform. Do you believe that bail reform is required and that the Liberals have failed on it?

Anuradha Dugal: Absolutely. Yes, I do. It is very important.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Dugal and Mrs. Goodridge.

Ms. Nathan, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Juanita Nathan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to share my time with Leslie. I know she was not able to get a question in, so I'll let her continue first.

Leslie Church: Thank you so much.

Marc, to jump straight to my question, based on the work you're doing and what you're seeing, how could government better recognize safe relocation and the costs associated with it, as part of the way we comprehensively look at our response system to gender-based violence?

Marc Hull-Jacquin: When we talk about housing, what's lost in the conversation are the basic effects of living. It's important to have a place to live. If your home is completely empty, where does the child sleep at night? It's quite a simple and basic question that every parent thinks about.

Shelter Movers fills this critical gap by ensuring that survivors are able to take what belongs to them when they leave. That sounds logistically complicated, and it is, but it's really a statement by the survivor that what belongs to her, belongs to her and her children. We think about the psychological and emotional benefit for children who sleep on sheets where they recognize their smell. That is, we recognize the value of putting sheets on a mattress a child lays down on in a different place they're not familiar with, but where they can smell what they know and what they recognize. Something as simple as that is what our volunteers and staff can provide our clients.

A system that recognizes the very difficult decision to leave and the intimidation that many of our clients experience, and that provides a practical solution at scale across the country, is one that will make an enormous difference and help break the cycle of violence. When survivors use Shelter Movers, they report being far less likely to return to their abuser. That is a long-term benefit. We are 10 years old. We have served children who were eight years old and are now becoming adults. I think about those children very often. I wonder if they are going to become the survivors and abusers themselves, or was the presence of Shelter Movers on that fateful night, when the mother made that phone call, a turning point in the trajectory of those people's lives?

We are one component of the ecosystem of services. We work with shelters very closely, but because we fill that critical gap, it is the scaling of our system that will allow us to provide more value across more locations, particularly in rural and indigenous communities.

• (1145)

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

My first question is for Andrea.

I know that shelters usually thrive on anonymity. Even though they are located in busy cities or streets, they normally don't advertise themselves. They take security precautions very seriously. Have you experienced intimate partners being let out of prison and coming to shelters to look for their partner?

Andrea Silverstone: My experience is that there's a hybrid of different models. Some shelters think anonymity is the way that they should be presenting themselves in the community, while oth-

ers don't do that at all. There are good reasons for both of those choices.

In my career, I have only twice had abusers show up at shelters looking for someone, with intent to harm them. For the most part, if a perpetrator is looking for the person they have victimized, they're generally going to do it in places where they're more likely to have access. There was recently a terrible case in Calgary where the perpetrator went to the school. That is one of the biggest risk places. Workplaces, schools and faith communities, I think, are the places where we most see perpetrators showing up with the intent to terrorize the victim.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

I'm going to speak solely for Ontario and for Toronto specifically. They have a central intake. However, for women to find housing.... The people who are in shelters are prioritized to find housing, but the housing list is so long that it's hard for them to find housing right away.

Can you suggest what changes would be beneficial to women even before going into a shelter if they could secure housing? For example, a lot of times they may be seeking community supports in organizations that do counselling or other types of supports. Would it be beneficial for them to get on the list from that time onwards?

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Nathan.

Ms. Silverstone, if you don't mention it in your next answer, I recommend you send an answer in written format. Thank you for this exchange.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Dugal, I'll be directing my questions to you during these last two and a half minutes that I have left for this very interesting and important study.

How can we reconcile potential federal leadership with respect for Quebec's jurisdiction over social services and housing?

Anuradha Dugal: If I understand correctly, you want me to state whether the federal government should oversee Quebec's shelter system. Is that it?

Andréanne Larouche: We're talking about this file as part of a federal study, whereas shelter and social services are under Quebec's jurisdiction. How can we reconcile these two things?

Anuradha Dugal: Yes, I understand.

First, I would mention the three Quebec organizations that indeed are responsible for helping and supporting shelters in Quebec. Quebec is leading some consultations and already has an action plan to prevent domestic and sexual violence. Right now, I think organizations in Quebec need more consultation with the Quebec government. If something is missing, they turn to the federal government, because they are heard.

Federal policies influence Quebec's policies in that the national action plan to end gender-based violence is a mechanism that helps prevent violence across Canada. Therefore, I completely support the autonomy of Quebec's organizations who have been doing this work for years. In fact, they do it very well.

● (1150)

Andréanne Larouche: I have 30 seconds left. I'll ask my question in 15 seconds, and you'll answer in 15 seconds.

Many groups decry the fact that senior women aged 65 to 74 remain in violent situations because they simply don't have the financial means to leave, especially due to insufficient retirement income and high housing costs. Have you observed this lack of financial means?

You have 10 seconds to answer my question.

Anuradha Dugal: Yes, absolutely. I think pensions for this group of women should be increased and paid in addition to their housing benefits.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Dugal.

Mrs. Roberts, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[English]

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for all the great work that is being done to help women.

I want to ask a question to all three of them, and it's a yes-or-no answer.

This morning I had the pleasure of meeting some wonderful women. I call them heroes. The organization that they represent is called Our Heart on Our Sleeve. These women have gone through sexual violence, violence at a very young age, and their concerns are twofold. One is that they don't feel that the bail reform laws protect them. The second is that there should be a registry for all individuals who have committed these crimes.

I'm going to start with you, Marc. Do you feel that the bail reforms sufficiently support and protect women, yes or no?

Marc Hull-Jacquin: I appreciate the question. It's simply not my field of expertise, so I won't respond.

Anna Roberts: Okay.

Ms. Silverstone, do you have a yes or no?

Andrea Silverstone: Yes, but it's only part of the whole system of things that we need to do.

Anna Roberts: Okay.

Ms. Dugal, do you think the bail reforms protect our women?

Anuradha Dugal: I think there needs to be more attention on how they can protect women, how they're implemented, and, like Ms. Silverstone, I agree there needs to be more than simply bail reform.

Anna Roberts: My next question is going to you, Ms. Silverstone.

Every one of you spoke about housing, and we know we have a lack of housing, especially with single seniors, who are.... Unfortunately, the tax fairness for them is unrealistic. They pay more in taxes as single seniors than as couples. We need to ensure that we change that.

One of the things I'm a little confused about is this. We have this housing crisis, and then we have these survivors who are trying to find a financially affordable place to live. Why are their perpetrators not being accountable for some of these costs? Why aren't we going after them and saying, "You've committed this crime; now you're going to pay your dues."

Do you not feel that they should be accountable and be responsible for what they've done?

Andrea Silverstone: Yes, and so does the Supreme Court of Canada, because they've just passed a tort of intimate partner violence. When perpetrators do have financial assets, there is now going to be a mechanism within Canada to go after them.

Anna Roberts: I'm not sure if you have heard of Cait Alexander. She has an organization called EVE. She testified here at the committee a few years ago. Unfortunately, that didn't go very well, but one of the things that we know is that intimate partner violence has increased 76%.

How do we continue on this path without making changes so that this number...? It shouldn't be 76%; it should be zero, as far as I'm concerned, but we continue to ignore the importance of all the laws that are involved, especially with bail reform.

If we're not going to protect these women, then we have to stop lying to each other. We either do something about the law or we do something different in how we protect them. How can we do this if we don't change the laws?

Does anybody want to take a stab at that?

Andrea Silverstone: I can quickly say that I think it's about changing the laws, but it's far more than that. We need to change norms, attitudes, values and beliefs in Canada about how we think about issues of gender-based violence and how we think about issues of gender.

This committee has looked at anti-feminist ideologies and misogyny. I think that this committee might also be undertaking a study on menopause. All of these pieces are part of what contributes to how society views gender, how society views women.

It's not just one thing. It has to be a whole-of-society response.

• (1155)

Anna Roberts: Would you also say that there should be an educational piece so that we can educate our men to understand the value of women and the importance of working together? Men should not have that power over women.

I have met with several survivors, and I'm telling you that the stories I've heard are that the perpetrator comes from a family that witnessed their father or grandfather do the same thing.

Would you say that an educational piece has to be implemented to ensure that this change happens in society?

Andrea Silverstone: I agree 100%.

Anna Roberts: Marc, go ahead.

Marc Hull-Jacquin: If I may, Shelter Movers recruits about 1,000 volunteers across Canada, many of whom are men.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hull-Jacquin. Time flies.

Ms. Nguyen, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Chi Nguyen (Spadina—Harbourfront, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being here on a really important topic. It's critical that we continue to explore and understand some of the dimensions we need to address in our systems, so women can truly imagine a life where they can live free of violence.

Building on Ms. Goodridge's question about best practice examples, I'm curious about whether Ms. Dugal, perhaps, could speak to any policy interventions at the provincial and municipal levels that are working really well, ones that we want to make sure get shared out across the country.

Anuradha Dugal: One example has already been mentioned: Clare's Law. I believe it makes a difference. Many provinces are now adopting it.

There are many local initiatives, including things like Ask for Angela, which is a prevention program. It's more to prevent sexual assault, but it is also important.

Safe houses are another model that has been implemented in different areas. Depending on what the needs are in northern communities like Nunavut.... Safe houses are extremely important because there are so few shelters and there is so much distance between shelters.

I think those examples also depend a bit on the local community and the needs identified there.

Chi Nguyen: Thanks very much.

I'm going to ask a question now about the role of the federal government.

A lot of shelter services and housing supports are delivered by the provinces and territories, municipalities and community organi-

zations. Could you each talk a bit about what an appropriate role of the federal government could be, in addition to financing and resourcing? What is our place here?

Marc Hull-Jacquin: Maybe I'll start with an example.

Shelter Movers received a level of funding from the federal government a few years ago to establish and scale a promising practice. The federal government viewed Shelter Movers as an innovative approach to responding to gender-based violence, and to preventing it. We received some funding to expand and establish chapters across the prairie provinces—Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Over a three-year period, we were able to build relationships with local shelters, police and law enforcement, then begin receiving survivors and getting them to a safe place.

Shelter Movers views the federal government's role as one that identifies these promising practices, supports promising and innovative scaling approaches, and takes a community-specific approach in its analysis to determine where the gaps are so that services available in one part of the country are available across the country, where appropriate.

Anuradha Dugal: The national action plan to end gender-based violence should support standardized service levels and regional inequities, in both funding and accessibility, to ensure that every survivor in every region can have timely, appropriate and sustainable safety, housing and support. That's where we think the federal government should step in right now.

Andrea Silverstone: We see the federal government as being responsible for our federal Criminal Code, as well as for parts of our Divorce Act. It's very important that the government pay attention to gender-based violence when making legislation, as well.

Domestic violence and personal violence are public health issues, and the Public Health Agency of Canada needs to be addressing them as such. The national action plan out of WAGE is great, but we also need to be looking at this as a public health issue across Canada.

Chi Nguyen: I'm going to ask a follow-up question about rural access and some of the challenges there in building out the infrastructure.

I live in a downtown riding. I know we have capacity there. Well, we need more capacity, but women know there are places to go.

Could you speak a bit about what we can be doing as a system to respond to those living in rural contexts, Ms. Silverstone?

• (1200)

Andrea Silverstone: We work a lot in rural and remote communities. We're in Alberta and Saskatchewan. One of the things that upset me the most is your postal code determining the level of service you get. That should not be the case. There needs to be equity, not equality. This means there needs to be additional funding given towards people living in rural and remote communities—given to rural and remote services to address the fact that there are additional costs and less service as a result of that. That's probably one of the most important things to note.

As well, Canada needs to get better at building infrastructure—such as Internet services, phone services and transportation services—across this great and very large country of ours.

Those are two things that I would say are very critical.

Chi Nguyen: There is a portable housing benefit for survivors of gender-based violence. Is it working? Is there too much red tape? How do we make it more efficient?

I'm sorry. I know we have only six seconds or so.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: That's excellent, you reached exactly zero.

Ladies and gentlemen, we thank you for being here today. We're grateful to you.

We will now conclude our first hour.

I will suspend the meeting. We will resume later in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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