IN WHOSE INTEREST?
Women, Violence and Loosening Gun Controls in Canada

YWCA Canada
Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security on Bill C-19

November 15, 2011

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“...we should not be diverted, here, from the most important point. This is about public safety. The registry has made Canada a safer country. The registry has saved lives. We lose it at our peril.”

Chief William Blair, as President, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

Preserving a Public Safety Measure
YWCA Canada is this country’s largest provider of shelter to women and children fleeing violence, and a longtime advocate for the safety and the rights of women and girls. As the nation’s oldest women’s services organization – we celebrated our 140th anniversary in 2010 – we oppose Bill C-19 and dismantling of the long-gun registry in the interests of the safety of women and children.

Bill C-19 will dismantle a critical safeguard intended to protect the safety of all Canadians: the non-restricted firearms registry. YWCA Canada passionately supported the implementation of Canada’s gun control laws, including the long-gun registry, because of our deep knowledge of the dangers and risks that rifles and shotguns pose to women experiencing intimate partner violence.

Each year, more than 100,000 women and children leave their homes in Canada for the safety of a shelter. Many of them come through the doors of the 31 shelters operated by our local YWCAs looking for safety, a roof over their heads and support. Our member associations operate shelters in Canada’s larger cities and in smaller centres, serving rural populations like Sudbury, Brandon, Prince Albert, Lethbridge, Peterborough, Saskatoon, Yellowknife and Iqaluit, where shot guns and rifles are part of the culture. And they are opposed to dismantling the long-gun registry as a safety issue for women and children in their communities. To quote Lyda Fuller, Executive Director of YWCA Yellowknife, “I worry about Aboriginal women, who surely must have a right to protection. I’m asking rural and northern MPs to think about the safety of Aboriginal women and about rates of teen suicide.”

When YWCA Canada argued for the implementation of these laws in 1995, we highlighted the dangers and risks rifles and shotguns pose to women experiencing intimate partner violence. We also remembered the infamous day in Canadian history that sparked the effort for gun control: December 6, 1989.

Following the killing of fourteen young women with a Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic assault rifle – which is still legal to possess in this country – on December 6, 1989 at Montreal’s École Polytechnique, Parliament passed Bills C-17 and C-68 to strengthen Canada’s gun laws. Despite
resistance from gun owners, the reforms included a requirement that all firearms, including long
guns, be registered by December 31, 2002.

While there was much to criticize in how the registry was developed, we agree with the Canadian
Association of Chiefs of Police: the registry has made Canada a safer country. The registry
embodies core Canadian values of good governance and peace. This is not a nation founded on the
right to bear arms, but on the precepts of peace, order and good government.

This is an information age and the non-restricted firearms registry is an online database
containing a wealth of information. It is a formidable tool, created at great expense to taxpayers,
and its use has increased dramatically.

**Licensing and Regulation – The Canadian Way**

With the possible exception of Royal Commissions, in the sphere of governance, nothing could
be more Canadian than licensing and regulation. We licence pets and bicycles, daycares and
radio stations. We register land and vehicle ownership, professional accreditations, births and
deaths. Laws require us to carry proof that we have insured and registered the vehicles we drive.
Why should long guns be exempt? Are long guns less lethal than cars? Are they more difficult to
register?

The arguments repeatedly made against the long-gun registry rest on a few points:
- Ending the registry will save billions of dollars that would be better spent elsewhere.
- There’s no “proof” that the registry works.
- The registry criminalizes law-abiding gun owners.

As Candice Hoeppner wrote in the *London Free Press* last year when she was sponsor of a
previous bill to dismantle the long-gun registry, “…the costs of the Liberal program had reached
at least $1 billion…money was being poured into programs that did nothing to fight crime, like
the long-gun registry… an end to the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry once and for all”
(March 10, 2010). Wasteful and ineffective. This language has been repeated ad hominem and
without supporting evidence, in an attempt to generate the impression among the general public
that the long-gun registry is useless and a continuing waste of billions of dollars. It isn’t, and
Canadians are aware it isn’t.

**Use of the Registry – The Canadian Firearms Registry Online (CFRO)**

Currently, the registration of a firearm ties that firearm to the licenced owner in the Canadian
Firearm Information System (CFIS). Through the Canadian Firearms Online Registry (CFRO), a
subset of CFIS, Canadian police agencies can query the name, address or firearms licence
number of an individual, or the serial number or registration certificate number of a firearm.
This is real-time access to a database updated daily which can be accomplished from a patrol car.

As of September 30, 2011 the registry contained records of 7,137,386 non-restricted firearms (that
is, rifles and shotguns), which comprised about 91% of all the registered firearms. The average
number of daily queries to the online registry by police services and other users reached 17,402
this year: several thousand more than the year before, and over eight times as many as in 2004 (www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/archives/quick_facts/2011/se-eng.htm). Total annual queries to CFRO increased from just 425,000 in 2004, to over five million in 2010 (ibid. and Report of the Commissioner of Firearms, 2008). Police forces across the country have rapidly increased their use of this database and have advocated for continuation of the long-gun registry as a public safety tool. Their message has been ignored.

A total of 31,625 firearms licences were refused (9083) or revoked (22,542) by Chief Firearms Officers for public safety reasons between Dec. 1, 1998 and the third quarter of 2011 (www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm and March 2007 archive), an average of about four or five hundred licences refused and about 2,000 revoked each year. How many lives did that save? No one knows, but a review of statistics over roughly the same period shows that the rate of spousal homicides with rifles and shotguns continued to decline, while the rate of spousal homicides by other means remained the same, and the total use of firearms fluctuated. Without a long-gun registry, how will revocations be enforced?

Regarding total homicides (including non-spousal), first, Statistics Canada’s annual Homicide in Canada Reports show that the overall rate of homicides committed with a firearm generally declined from the mid-1970s to 2002, and that although there were some increases in the 2000s, this was not due as much to the use of long guns, whose misuse has been declining, as to the use of restricted and prohibited weapons such as hand guns.

**Firearm-related homicides, by type of firearm, Canada, 1980 to 2010**


The evidence clearly shows a continuing decline in homicides committed with rifles and shotguns, coincident with increasing use of the long-gun registry by Canadian police services. At
the same time, the use of firearms in violence has increased. And while spousal homicides with rifles and shotguns have decreased, spousal homicides by all other means have not.

**Number of spousal homicides, 1995 to 2008 by gender and weapon**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>By rifle or Shotgun</th>
<th>By all other means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.*

The risk factors leading to refusals or revocations of firearm licences mirror the risk factors identified by Ontario’s Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, highlighting a strong connection between access to firearms and intimate partner violence. The Committee found that the presence of seven or more risk factors (such as a previous history of domestic violence, violence outside of the family, potential risk to self or others, mental health issues, substance use, and access to firearms) increases the risk that a physical assault will escalate to homicide by 84% (*Fifth Annual Report of the Domestic Violence Review Committee, 2007*).

Non-restricted firearms constitute the vast majority of Canada’s Firearms Registry; eliminating these registrations will erase the critical information needed to continually assess safety risks to women and children.

**The Cost Question**

A central argument that has been offered against the long-gun registry is that the costs of running it are excessive and the money would be better spent elsewhere. In 2011, this is untrue and not supported by facts.

There is no question that the process of developing the registry included a history of exceptional mismanagement. The initial 1995 Department of Justice estimate of a $2 million net cost based on costs of $119 million, offset by $117 million in revenues through fees, was by 2001-2002, revised to spending approximately $688 million, with only $59 million in revenues collected for a net cost of $629 million. In a scathing report, the Auditor-General cast doubt even upon the accuracy of those figures (*Report of the Auditor General of Canada, December 2002*). That report is almost a decade old now, and the situation has changed.
At the same time, the Auditor General noted that revenues from fees “had fallen far short of original expectations” and that “revenues were reduced through a series of fee reductions and refunds to owners of firearms” (Report of the Auditor General of Canada, December 2002). Despite overwhelming costs, the Canadian Firearms Program was directed to introduce a fee waiver to promote compliance, effective May 17, 2006, for the renewal of possession only licences (POL) and possession and acquisition licences (PAL) of non-restricted firearms. The waiver was originally due to end May 16, 2010 but has been extended to May 16, 2012. In addition, a fees remission order allows those who have renewed and paid their licence fees between December 1, 1998 and May 17, 2006 to be refunded. (www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/notice-avis/fee-frais-eng.htm) These decisions have resulted in the loss of millions of dollars of revenue that would have offset costs.

In May 2006, the Auditor General of Canada reported that the Canada Firearms Centre had made “satisfactory progress in implementing” the 2002 recommendations on financial reporting except with regard to two accounting errors in the development of CFIS II (Status Report of the Auditor General, May 2006). From its inception in 1995 to 2005, the net costs of the Canadian Firearms Program totaled $946 million. The average annual cost of the total Canadian Firearms Program was approximately $93 million, but more recently, the total Treasury Board allocations for it have been about $70 million per year.¹

In 2011, the set-up period for the long-gun registry is long over. The billions of taxpayer dollars invested in this public safety tool will truly be wasted if Bill C-19 becomes law. If the tool they were spent to create is destroyed, despite its usefulness, who will be responsible for wasting this substantial public investment of public dollars?

The question today is not the mismanagement of another era, but the future of the very useful tool that now exists: a modern database that is constantly consulted by Canadian police services in the course of their duties. We should have more respect for our police services than to suggest that they would consult a useless system more than five million times in a year.

Ending Violence in Canada

As the largest single provider of services for women and children fleeing violence in the country, ending violence against women is a priority for YWCA Canada. Ending violence against women will require much more from Canadians than willingness to complete a registration form in order to own a hunting rifle, or to purchase a notorious Ruger Mini-14, capable of killing many women in one quick incident. In 2009, nearly 75,000 incidents of violent crime against women by current or former spouses or someone they were otherwise in an intimate relationship with were reported to the police (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11416/tbl/tbl002-eng.htm). It is estimated that over 70% of such incidents go unreported. Women are three times

¹ See www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/fire-feu-eval/pg13-9-eng.htm and www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2010-2011/inst/rcm/rcm02-eng.asp#firearms; the personnel and technology costs for just maintain the long-gun registry portion of their total operations is estimated to be only about $4M a year, as explained in the first link above.
to four times more likely than men to be victims of spousal homicide. In the past decade, an average of 58 women in Canada were killed each year by a current or previous partner; over a quarter of them by means of firearms (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2010000/t024-eng.htm).

Whether they are non-restricted, restricted or prohibited, firearms serve as instruments of control, intimidation and abuse in cases of intimate partner violence. The accessibility of long guns is critical to this issue. For example, between 1985 and 1995, 71% of all spousal homicides with firearms involved rifles and shotguns, 24% involved a handgun, 4% involved the use of a sawed-off rifle/shotgun, and 1% involved other types of firearms (http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/Statcan/85-002-XIE/0079785-002-XIE.pdf page 7). Between 1995 and 2008, 72% of the female victims of spousal homicides with firearms were killed either by regular rifles or shotguns (150, or 61.7% of all such firearms killings) or their sawn-off varieties (26, or 10.7%), for an average of 13 a year by one of those weapons (Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey).

In 2008, Statistics Canada reported that while the use of handguns to commit homicides has increased in metropolitan areas, long guns are more likely to be used in non-metropolitan areas. Yet overall, Canada continues to see a decrease in the use of long guns in homicides. In 2007, Statistics Canada demonstrated that since 1995, spousal homicides with long guns have decreased by at least 50% (Homicide in Canada, 2006). The chart below illustrates how that trend has continued.

Firearm-related spousal homicides by type of firearm, Canada, 1980 to 2009

![Diagram showing firearm-related spousal homicides by type of firearm, Canada, 1980 to 2009](chart)


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2 3.3 times more, in the interval between 1978 and 1997 (1,476 female victims of spousal homicides vs. 442 male), and 4.0 times in the 1998-2007 period (595 vs. 149). Source: Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada: A statistical Profile 1999 and 2009 editions, at Tables 5.3 and 5.4.
Note(s): Rates are calculated on the basis of 1,000,000 population. Populations based upon July 1st estimates from Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Includes legally married, common-law, separated, and divorced persons age 15 years or older. Excludes homicides of same-sex spouses due to the unavailability of population data on same-sex couples.

The bottom line is clear. Death rates by long guns have reduced substantially since the inception of the non-restricted firearm registry.

A Case in Point
When RCMP Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak, as he then was, testified before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU) on Bill C-391 on May 4, 2010 he described a chilling incident that clearly illustrates the effectiveness of the long-gun registry. A family contacted their local police because the father was in a “depressed state” and they wanted the police to “remove all of the firearms from their home”. Family members told the police what firearms were in the house, then the police checked the registry. Chief Superintendent Cheliak reported that “A Canadian Firearms Registry Online query by local police indicated that there were 21 additional long guns in the home that the other family members knew nothing about. A warrant was obtained and all firearms were removed by police, preventing a potential firearms tragedy. Without the registry, there would not have been any knowledge of the additional 21 firearms.” (http://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Parlvu/ContentEntityDetailView.aspx?ContentEntityId=6113 and http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=4497859&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=3#Int-3140301).

How many times have we seen the horrific news stories of families murdered by a depressed father? This potential one did not happen, because of the registry. How many lives were saved by the long-gun registry with that one check?

In Whose Interest?
Lyda Fuller, the Executive Director of YWCA Yellowknife, which operates a shelter in Yellowknife and processes almost all of the Emergency Protection Orders for the territory, reports that “Women have told us that the guns used here in the North predominantly for hunting – that is, long guns – are also used to intimidate, subdue and control them. We hear this over and over again, in small communities without RCMP and in larger communities with RCMP. Women do not want these guns to be unregistered, but do not feel safe expressing this opinion other than in whispers to people who may be able to voice these ‘unpopular’ opinions and who may be heard.” Lyda Fuller asks us to listen to women in the north:

… it is not city-born, city living folks who are asking for this registry to continue; it is the voices of northern women who fear for their lives and their mental health who are asking for protection. We see women who have experienced years of brutal intimidation. These women cannot safely express their need for protection themselves, and it is up to Canada to understand this and respond in an appropriate way.”
Dismantling the long gun registry will not serve the interests of women and children vulnerable to violence. It will put them and the police services who respond to domestic violence at greater risk.

YWCA Canada urges you make a decision on the facts and assess the benefits of the non-restricted firearms registry. There is no evidence that in 2011 it is ineffective and wasteful. There is ample evidence to the contrary. Ask, who will dismantling the long-gun registry benefit? What compelling arguments have they made? Have the facts been lost in outlandish claims? Who will it harm? The long-gun registry is managed with competence and prudence. Legally-owned rifles and shotguns represent over 90% of the registry. The elimination of those records will unnecessarily curtail a critical safeguard and the crucial data needed to ensure the safety of women, children and the general public.

About YWCA Canada:
YWCA Canada is the country’s oldest and largest women’s multi-service organization. With 34 Member Associations operating in more than 400 districts and communities across the country, our Turning Point Programs for Women™ address personal safety, economic security and well-being in nine provinces and two territories. YWCA is the largest single provider of shelter to women, serving 25,000 women, children and teen girls including 6,000 fleeing domestic violence each year. We are the largest provider of literacy, life skills, employment and counselling programs in the country, and the second largest provider of childcare services. YWCA Canada is a member association of the World YWCA which unites 25 million women and girls worldwide and spans 125 countries. For more information about YWCA Canada and our Member Associations, visit www.ywcacanada.ca or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ywcacanada and Twitter @YWCA_Canada.