

Status of Women Council
of the N.W.T.



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April 28, 1995

Honorable Richard Nerysoo
Minister of Education
Govt. of the NWT
Box 1320
Yellowknife, NWT
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Dear Richard,

We wish to address the remarks you made in the Assembly April 26th regarding Bill 32.

We believe that your remarks were most sincere and you made some very good points. We also wish to congratulate you for the respect you showed the Honorable Stephen Kakfwi by staying in your seat while he made his remarks.

However, we do wish to point out that the Legislative Assembly has been struggling with the issue of the conduct of its members for many years, and has not taken the responsibility for requiring high standards of conduct and policing accordingly. You suggest that it is the membership of the Assembly who should police themselves given their mandate from the people; but the people, particularly the victims of violence, have pretty well given up on that ever happening.

We have inquired with the RCMP and they cannot think of a single case where someone has been found guilty of a crime of assault in the NWT when they were legitimately defending themselves or another person as long as excessive force was not used.

We have had discussions with Mr. Avison and we are content with the amendments he proposes. We do not disagree that this Bill like many others has reached second reading requiring work.

On the issue of Constitutionality, we wish to point out that some legislation which has stood for many years has eventually been struck down as unconstitutional. The whole "rape shield" fiasco is a case in point. This possibility, however, has not stopped legislators from passing laws which they feel are needed for the good of society. It is most certainly for the good of society that MLAs adhere to Zero Tolerance for Violence.

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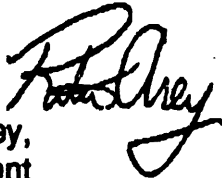
You made an excellent point when you talked about the verbal, mental and emotional abuse which goes on in the Assembly and believe me, people notice and comment on it all the time. However, if we cannot deal with physical acts of violence, how do we ever hope to deal with the other more subtle forms of violence?

We just finished reviewing a study completed by the University of Manitoba which shows statistically beyond a shadow of a doubt that children who are subjected to physical violence and/or witness physical violence in their homes and communities on a regular basis are overwhelmingly at risk for becoming involved in violence themselves. Children who receive or witness verbal, mental and emotional abuse only are at far less risk. This study also talks in eloquent terms about the messages sent by societies which do not legislate strongly against violence. If you would like a copy of the study, we will be glad to obtain one for you.

In conclusion, the Council must support some form of legislation which would cause an MLA found guilty of a violent offense to lose his or her seat for these reasons:

- 1. The women of the NWT overwhelmingly supported Zero Tolerance for Violence by MLAs so they want the declaration to have teeth.**
- 2. MLAs must be positive role models.**
- 3. Year after year, in consultation after consultation, people of the NWT have said that stopping the violence has to start with our elected officials.**
- 4. In every meeting, workshop and consultation we are involved in, we observe a higher level of disgust at the behavior of some of our elected officials.**
- 5. Violence is destroying our people and costing millions of dollars a year.**
- 6. The victims are tired of waiting for the MLAs to police themselves. They feel legislation is necessary.**

Sincerely,



Rita Arey,
President

cc Status of Women Council board members
Native Women's Association of the NWT
Pauktuutit
All MLAs