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Justine Akman, Director, Social Policy and Programs
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
365 Laurier Avenue W, 8th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1

April 25, 2011

Dear Ms Akman:

On behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), a province-wide network of women's emergency shelters, I am writing to strongly oppose the Harper government's proposed "Conditional Permanent Residency" measure for sponsored spouses entering Canada.

The proposed measure to create a two-year (or longer) period of conditional permanent residency for sponsored spouses is dangerous to women and would effectively establish *legislated* inequality and subservience for immigrant women in Canada. Since the majority of "sponsored spouses" entering Canada are women, this proposal has a gendered impact that flies in the face of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the Harper government's claim that women in Canada are "equal".

The proposed measure not only increases the precarious nature of women's immigration status after applying for residency in Canada, it also has significant potential to jeopardize women's personal safety and security rights under the *Charter* and the *Canadian Bill of Rights*.

As an organization of agencies with over 30 years of experience working with women escaping violence in relationships, OAITH and its members are well-placed to inform the Government of Canada on the potential outcomes of virtually forcing women to remain in marriages where there is abuse, or be punished by the State. Sadly, when women who enter Canada are subjected to violence, we know that they will experience its consequences—including murder—well within a period of two years.

At the same time, children will be exposed to violence as a result of the proposed legislation and will feel the impact of that exposure well within the period they are trapped waiting for escape. Exposure to violence against women, as you may know, is also a reportable event for child welfare agencies in many regions of Canada. The proposed measure could well mean that women will be caught between systems, one forcing them to leave an abusive relationship or face losing their children, one forcing them to stay in an abusive relationship or face losing their residency in Canada.

Has the Government of Canada thought through the consequences and implications of imposing this proposed legislation on women? Has the Government of Canada applied the gender-based analysis that the Government of Canada claims occurs within the policy branches of the federal government?

The proposed legislation, in effect, results in a kind of ‘forced marriage’ for women who enter Canada, a measure we would hope is not supported by a government charged with protecting women’s human and equality rights. For women and their children experiencing violence, it is a potent tool of control for abusive partners. It is, therefore, hard to believe that any gender or equity analysis has taken place on this proposal.

The Government of Canada, rather than further marginalizing and jeopardizing immigrant women in Canada, should instead turn its attention to measures by which it can support immigrant women and children in Canada. In particular, government time and action would be better spent building supports for immigrant women and their children in Canada who experience violence before and after entering the country. Among such measures would be concrete supports and services for immigrant women to surmount the many barriers they face in escaping/ addressing violence in their lives and cessation of enforcement to drive them out of Canada when they attempt to find safety from violence here.

Legislation to create a “conditional permanent residency” is a measure that increases danger to women and children in Canada and enforces a subservient status on women within legislation. This proposal contradicts the principles and substance of women’s human rights, fundamental freedoms and equality; it must not proceed.

We would appreciate your response to our concerns and questions at your earliest convenience, along with information about how we might provide additional submissions as this proposal goes forward. You can contact me at the above email address, by mail to OAITH, 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1404, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3, or by phone at 416-977-6619. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Eileen Morrow, Coordinator
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)