

West Coast LEAF welcomes criminal charges against key Bountiful leaders

Media Release For immediate release

January 7, 2009 - West Coast LEAF is pleased by the important step taken by the Attorney General of British Columbia today in pressing charges against Winston Blackmore and James Oler, two leaders in the fundamentalist religious community of Bountiful, BC.

"The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* creates a positive obligation on governments in Canada to protect women from patterns of historical disadvantage," says Alison Brewin, Executive Director of West Coast LEAF. "The lack of action to protect the fundamental freedoms and rights of the women of Bountiful has been contrary to women's *Charter* rights. These charges will allow the courts, the government, the women of Bountiful and all Canadians to determine the boundaries of religious freedom when women's equality is at stake - a question of interest to many in the world today. West Coast LEAF, as a public interest legal organization, is very, very interested in where this case goes."

West Coast LEAF is particularly concerned about the way in which polygamy is practiced in closed communities like Bountiful - in that it limits women's choices, undermines their capacity to leave the community, and creates serious vulnerability for young women and girls to sexual and other exploitation. In the case of Bountiful, these vulnerabilities are reinforced by the closed nature of the community, including the control of information.

As the case progresses, West Coast LEAF also urges that attention be given to the impact on women and children in the community and to ensure that women have the services, programs and information they need. This includes family law legal aid, transition house support, advocacy regarding social assistance and specialized religious counseling.

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About [West Coast LEAF](#)

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

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