



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Loss of Court Challenges Program a Loss for Canada, says Women's Legal Organization**

TORONTO – The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) is appalled at the federal government's decision to cut funding to the Court Challenges Program. Without this important source of support, the capacity of Canadians to advance the equality rights guaranteed under Canada's Constitution will be greatly diminished.

“This is a devastating loss to Canada's most vulnerable groups,” says Audrey Johnson, Executive Director of LEAF. “Without the CCP it means that ‘ordinary citizens’ will be less able to protect or restore their rights when they are infringed by laws or actions of the state.”

The Court Challenges Program has been an important source of funding for individuals and equality seeking groups to use to ensure that the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups are protected under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the rest of the Constitution.

LEAF has intervened in numerous cases at the Supreme Court of Canada supported by funds from the Program. In these cases, LEAF has made important arguments supporting pay equity for women, maternity benefits, the right of women to say no to sexual assault, the right for women to exercise control over their bodies, and many other issues necessary to the equal participation of women in Canadian society. Although the majority of the cases were argued with the help of pro-bono counsel, because of the high cost of litigation, and the many barriers to access to justice, it is unlikely that cases like these would be brought in the absence of some support from the Court Challenges Program.

In fact, the Court Challenges Program has been recognized around the world as an essential element in ensuring access to justice for Canada's most marginalized people. The UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights previously commended Canada on having developed the Court Challenges Program, “recognizing the importance of effective legal remedies against violations of social and economic and cultural rights....”

“The loss of the program not only impacts us domestically, but also injures Canada's international reputation for progressive democratic systems,” says Kim Brooks, Chair of the LEAF Board of Directors. “It is truly disappointing that the government cannot see the necessity of such a program for upholding the principles of our democratic system.”

LEAF calls on the Harper government to reverse its decision to cancel the Court Challenges Program to ensure that Canadians can access their equality rights as guaranteed in the Constitution.

LEAF is a national non-profit corporation and federally registered charity founded in 1985 to advance the equality of women and girls in Canada through litigation, law reform and public legal education using the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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