



WEST COAST LEGAL EDUCATION & ACTION FUND

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July 6, 2009

Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
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Premier @gov.bc.ca

Honourable Kash Heed
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor
General
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Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
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Dear Premier Campbell and Mr. Heed,

I am writing to express West Coast LEAF's concern about the closure of the Mobile Access Project (MAP) and the cancellation of the MAP Van.

The MAP Van is a service that offered condoms, food, harm reduction supplies and health supplies to women working in the sex trade in Vancouver. In addition, and very importantly, the MAP Van recorded and disseminated "bad date sheets", which allowed women to safely and widely communicate about incidences of violence and descriptions of the johns involved; this information is absolutely vital to improving these women's safety on the streets. The MAP has published 233 new reports of violence in the last two years, and estimates that the incidents are actually much higher in number. The MAP Van served 13,650 women between April 2007 and March 2008, and gave out 95,376 condoms in that one year period. The service costs about \$20,000 a month to staff and operate. Due to government cuts, the MAP Van has not been running since June 12, 2009.

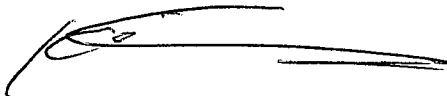
The government has an obligation to protect its most vulnerable citizens. By failing to adequately fund the MAP Van services, the government is choosing to place immediate (and minimal) monetary savings over the safety of vulnerable women and girls. In tough economic times, we must remember both the social and long term economic benefits of preventative work. For many women working in the sex trade, this service can mean the difference between life and death, or between physical integrity and sexual assault.

If you have doubts about the implications of this cut on the lives of women and girls on the street, I urge you to read the affidavit evidence filed in the ongoing litigation *SWUAV v. Canada*, CA036762. Women involved in the street level sex trade often are drug users and experience great difficulty in negotiating safe sex with consumers and with intimate partners who hold the power when it comes to condom use and sharing of drug paraphernalia. Many of the affidavits filed in this case detail the horrific dangers that women in the sex trade face every day, and emphasize the importance of the MAP services to their physical and mental wellbeing.

Both constitutional and international human rights obligations protect these women's rights to life and security of the person, as well as to equality. Human rights obligations, writ large, are designed to protect the integrity of the individual, both physically and in terms of their inherent human dignity. The denial of this inexpensive service to our most vulnerable citizens is, in our opinion, an infringement of their human rights. This minimal level of service comes cheap – but without it, more women are at risk of getting infected with HIV and Hep C, going hungry and being victimized by violent johns. **We urge you to reinstate funding to the MAP Van to ensure that this program continues to improve women's safety on the streets.**

Thank you for considering our submission on this important issue facing your constituents. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Kasari Govender
Legal Director

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