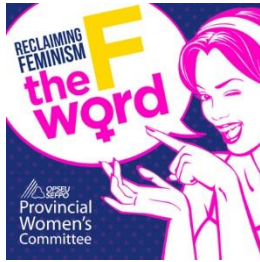


The F-Word: Reclaiming Feminism
OPSEU Women's Conference 2015



To: The Honorable John McCallum, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
The Honourable Patty Hadju, Minister of the Status of Women

We request the immediate repeal of Bill S-7: The Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act

We believe that while Bill S-7 purports to protect women from violence, it actually serves as another example of institutional barriers that prevent marginalized communities from reporting violence and having access to the support they need.

First, we believe the Bill to be unnecessary because it reproduces legislation that is already in place-- there are existing provisions addressing polygamous unions; and in the case of forced marriage, setting out requirements for parental consent and consent of the court for marriages between the national minimum age and the age of majority. The current Bill is not only extraneous but explicitly targets racialized communities since it criminalizes forced marriage and bars immigrants who allegedly practice polygamy.

The Bill also perpetuates myths about polygamy and forced marriage. For instance, the Bill mischaracterizes the issue of "free and enlightened" consent to marriage as necessary to protect women and girls from "cultural" violence in specific "immigrant communities." This perpetuates the erroneous view that immigrant and racialized communities are somehow not "enlightened," nor "free", and therefore require the additional protection of the law. Rather, given that the Bill adds nothing further to existing legislation, we believe the real purpose of the legislation is simply to target racialized and immigrant women, their families and communities.

Further, the current legislative framework contains very little protection or assistance for women or children who are the survivors of abuse. In fact, changes to the *Criminal Code* in particular would likely harm women and their families and communities. Forced Marriage survivors have repeatedly indicated that they would be hesitant to seek assistance if this would result in criminal and subsequent immigration consequences for the family members upon which they depend. The changes regarding peace bonds and marriage ceremonies clearly puts the onus on survivors to come forward to the justice system to get protection, which will only further expose women to gender-based violence.

We believe the government's focus on criminalization forced marriage, among other problematic aspects of this Bill, is deeply misplaced. Rather, we call for the repeal of the Bill and supporting survivors of violence through strengthened education, housing, employment and healthcare supports.