

THE MISSING WOMEN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

[APPLICATION for STANDING and FUNDING](#)

Women's Equality & Security Coalition
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VIA EMAIL

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Missing Women Commission of Inquiry
1402- 808 Nelson Street, Vancouver
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2H2

Application for Standing to Participate

1. The Women's Equality & Security Coalition ("WESC") is an ad hoc group of women's organizations dedicated to the protection and advancement of women's liberty, dignity, security and equality. We are a non-partisan coalition made up of diverse organizations. We represent a wide cross section of women in our society, including women of different socio-economic backgrounds, faiths, and ethnicities. We have come together to participate in the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry because we believe that the issues raised by this inquiry affect the lives and rights of all women and girls, and particularly the rights of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

The women of British Columbia deserve a thorough investigation that is assisted by the expert questioning, understanding and perspective that only a broad based coalition of women's organizations can provide because of its expert knowledge about the factors which affect women's equality and security. It is our goal to assist the Commission in its fact finding and development of recommendations by presenting evidence, examining and cross examining witnesses and making submissions. WESC is comprised of eleven organizations from all parts of the province but primarily the Lower Mainland. More detailed information about each organization is attached as Appendix A.

2. The extent to which WESC's interests may be affected by the Commission's findings:

WESC interests are the safety and security of women and children in British Columbia and of vulnerable women and girls in particular. WESC interests are also the achievement of equality rights and the realization of full dignity and liberty for all women, and for vulnerable women and girls in particular. The Commission of Inquiry will need to look into police responses to violence against women generally and against particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged women and girls; police and Crown treatment of missing women and in particular of women and girls who are economically

disadvantaged, Aboriginal, racialized, or in prostitution; community and police attitudes and biases towards these marginalized women and girls; police investigations – resources, priorities, protocols and procedures; regional and municipal policing structures, cooperation and coordination; police, Crown and judicial practice around applications for search warrants; Crown charging policies and practices; the urban/suburban environment and tolerance for street prostitution; and other factors and issues related to the investigations and criminal justice response to the missing women. All of these issues and factors affect the safety and security of women and girls in the province and of vulnerable women and girls in particular. All of these matters affect the possibility of achieving women's equality and the full realization of their human rights. These areas of the Commission's investigation are squarely within the interests and concerns of the WESC.

The Terms of Reference and purpose of the Commission are broad enough to provide flexibility, discretion and choice to the Inquiry. For example the Commission's choice of witnesses and the examination of their testimony and the conclusions which may be drawn will relate intrinsically to the permissible scope of the Commission's review and the nature of the recommendations that it chooses to make. The Commission's scope of inquiry, interpretations of findings of fact and the breadth and perspective of its selection of recommendations will have a direct impact on all the women and children of British Columbia in terms of their safety and protection from violence and exploitation. The Commission's inquiry and recommendations will also have a tangible influence on the ability of women and girls to enjoy their human rights, including their Charter rights to life, liberty, dignity and equality.

3. Whether WESC's participation would further the conduct of the Inquiry:

It is anticipated that the conduct of the Inquiry will be dominated by evidence, testimony and submissions from criminal justice and other governmental sources. It is clear that the police forces and the Crown have significant roles to play. As well the Commission will be informed by work of its legal counsel and research staff. However, the conduct of the Inquiry will also benefit from and be assisted if there is an active participation of non-police, non-governmental and non-legal entities. The conduct of the Inquiry will be

enhanced, in our view, by the contributions of knowledgeable parties who are also unencumbered by a monetary, or institutional or power-based interest. WESC can play a vital role in furthering the conduct of the Inquiry by providing expert guidance and truth-seeking from the perspective of what is critical to advancing the equality rights of women and girls and what is beneficial for women and children. Although this may be a larger unarticulated goal of all parties to the Commission, WESC is specifically tasked with this as its mandate for contributing to the work of the Commission. The conduct of the Inquiry will necessarily be enriched by a balance in questioning and understanding of the relevant substantive issues.

WESC appreciates the necessity and desirability of the powerful and informed voices of the families of the victims and of those who live and work in the DTES. We assume that there will be ample opportunities for these citizens to share their experiences, views and recommendations with the Commission. As stated at the beginning of this application, our composition and purpose is distinct. This will enable us to offer the Commission a different, broader and essential expert contribution.

4. Whether WESC's participation would contribute to the fairness of the Inquiry:

Women, and especially vulnerable women and girls, are at the heart of this Inquiry. The contributions of a broad-based coalition of groups that are expert on women's equality rights and on the challenges, concerns, and actual conditions that women and girls face, is essential for a fair process. The Commission cannot present credible conclusions in the absence of balanced evidentiary sources and submissions. Police, Crown, persons directly involved in the affected communities and the families will provide critical evidence, as will WESC. WESC will also contribute meaningfully to the fairness of this process by offering women-centered and child-centred interpretations and examination of the evidence of these interested parties. Our role will be to highlight the realities, dangers and challenges that women and girls face. Our role will also be to help the Commission maintain a balanced weighing of the interests before it with the goal of preventing further similar tragedies through a comprehensive analytical review of all the factors. It is women's rights to safety, dignity, respect and equality that were denied in their lives, by their murders and in the mishandled criminal investigation. In

the absence of meaningful changes to the priorities, procedures and work of governmental institutions, women and girls will continue to be at risk and continue to lose their lives. WESC 's contribution to the fairness of this Inquiry will be to keep the Commission aware of the global issues and impact of its work on the whole community of women and children, who so far have endured the high risks of encountering predators and ineffective state responses to these risks. It is our submission that a fair Commission process requires the participation and contribution of an objective expert women's coalition. WESC has the knowledge, credibility and experience to act in this role.

Application for Funding

The Women's Equality and Security Coalition (WESC) is an ad hoc coalition of eleven women's and human rights organizations, newly formed for the sole purpose of participating in the Commission of Inquiry into Missing Women. To date the work of WESC has been done in the absence of any funding; member groups have volunteered their time toward the work of the coalition.

WESC is seeking funding from the Commission/Attorney General because we do not have sufficient financial resources to participate in the work of the Commission without financial assistance for preparation, materials and legal counsel (see supporting affidavit).