



October 1, 2025

The Right Honourable Mark Carney
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2
pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Carney,

Re: Urgent Concern Regarding Proposed Cuts to Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)

We are writing on behalf of the Leadership Table for [Waterloo Region's Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) Strategy](#). This collaborative initiative is anchored by frontline, community-based GBV agencies, including sexual assault support services, shelters, counselling and outreach programs, legal advocacy, and culturally specific services. We work in partnership with institutional stakeholders such as education, municipal and regional governments, and police. Together, we are building a coordinated response to prevent and address gender-based violence.

We are deeply alarmed by the recent Departmental Plan for Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), which indicates a potential 80 percent reduction in funding by 2027–28, from approximately \$407 million in 2025–26 to just \$76 million. This scale of reduction would destabilize services nationwide and undermine the progress of community-driven strategies like ours.

The Urgency in Waterloo Region

Gender-based violence is not an abstract issue in Waterloo Region. It is a crisis.

- In 2019, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives ranked the Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo area as the least safe urban centre in Canada for women, based on rates of sexual assault, harassment, and intimate partner violence.
- In 2023, our Region officially declared intimate partner violence and gender-based violence an epidemic, recognizing the devastating and widespread impact on individuals, families, and communities.
- Waterloo Region has the third highest rates of sex trafficking in Canada, with survivors requiring highly specialized, intensive, and long-term supports.

- Local agencies continue to face overwhelming demand and persistent waitlists for trauma counselling, crisis response, and shelter services. Despite coordinated community efforts, the gap between need and available resources continues to grow.

Our GBV Strategy exists because no single organization or sector can solve this crisis alone. Federal leadership and investment through WAGE are essential to sustaining collaborative, multi-sector responses like ours.

Concerns Shared Across Ontario and Canada

We echo the concerns of our provincial and national partners.

- The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) has stated it is “alarmed” by the proposed WAGE cuts, emphasizing that such reductions would be “devastating” to front-line sexual assault services across Ontario.
- YWCA Canada has publicly warned that these cuts would “effectively gut the entire department responsible for women’s rights and gender equality in this country,” undermining essential programs, decades of GBA+ work, and critical supports for marginalized and 2SLGBTQI+ communities.
- The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW-ICREF), in its joint statement *“Gender Equality is not Optional,”* has also warned that an 80 percent reduction is not routine budget tightening but a catastrophic rollback of women’s and gender-diverse rights. They caution that the cuts would gut WAGE’s mandate, placing at risk the 2SLGBTQI+ Secretariat, the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, the Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan, and access to life-saving funding for shelters, sexual assault services, and victim services.

Our Call to Action

We urge the Government of Canada to:

1. Protect and sustain core funding for WAGE, particularly programs addressing gender-based violence and survivor support.
2. Provide stable, multi-year funding that allows communities like Waterloo Region to plan, collaborate, and deliver coordinated services.
3. Renew and expand national initiatives such as the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and the 2SLGBTQI+ Community Capacity Fund.
4. Apply Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to all fiscal decisions, recognizing that women, survivors, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities are disproportionately harmed when funding is reduced.
5. Consult directly with regional coalitions such as Waterloo Region’s GBV Leadership Table, alongside the OCRCC, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transitional Houses, YWCA Canada, and CRIAW-ICREF, to ensure that local and provincial realities shape national decision-making.

Conclusion

The proposed cuts to WAGE jeopardize not only federal commitments to gender equality but also the safety, dignity, and futures of survivors in communities across Canada. In Waterloo Region, a community already recognized as the least safe urban centre for women, facing an epidemic of gender-based violence and some of the highest rates of sex trafficking in the country, sustained federal support is not optional. It is essential.

On behalf of the Leadership Table for Waterloo Region's GBV Strategy, we urge your government to reconsider these reductions and reaffirm Canada's leadership in preventing and addressing gender-based violence.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet and share more about the urgent needs of our community.

Respectfully,



Sara Casselman

Executive Director, Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region
Co-Chair, Leadership Table, Waterloo Region's GBV Strategy (sara@sascwr.org)



Jennifer Hutton

Chief Executive Officer, Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region
Co-Chair, Leadership Table, Waterloo Region's GBV Strategy (Jennifer.Hutton@wcswr.org)

cc:

Minister of Small Business and Minister of Women and Gender Equality

- The Honourable Rechie Valdez, Rechie.Valdez@fegc-wage.gc.ca

Members of Parliament, Waterloo Region

- The Honourable Bardish Chagger, MP for Waterloo — bardish.chagger@parl.gc.ca
- The Honourable Kelly DeRidder, MP for Kitchener Centre — kelly.deridder@parl.gc.ca
- The Honourable Tim Louis, MP for Kitchener–Conestoga — tim.louis@parl.gc.ca
- The Honourable Matt Strauss, MP for Kitchener South–Hespeler — matt.strauss@parl.gc.ca
- The Honourable Connie Cody, MP for Cambridge — connie.cody@parl.gc.ca

Waterloo Region GBV Leadership Table Members

- Dejana Bjelogrljic, Director, Programs and Services, Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health — dbjelogrljic@caminowellbeing.ca
- Fauzia Mazhar, Executive Director, Coalition of Muslim Women of KW — fauzia.mazhar@cmw-kw.org
- Sonia Dennis, Executive Director, Family & Children's Services of Waterloo Region — sonia.dennis@facswaterloo.org
- Cameron Dearlove, Executive Director, Porchlight Counselling & Addictions Services — camerond@porchlightcnd.org
- Lindsay Sweeney-Hockin, Executive Director, SHORE Centre — lsh@shorecentre.ca
- Christine Taylor, Program Manager, Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre of Waterloo Region — christine.taylor@wrhn.ca
- Trisha Robinson, Executive Director, Wilmot Family Resource Centre — trisha@wilmotfamilyresourcecentre.ca
- Amanda Wood-Atkinson, Executive Director, Woolwich Counselling Centre — amanda.woodatkinson@woolwichcounselling.org
- Jennifer Breaton, Chief Executive Officer, YW Kitchener-Waterloo — jennifer.breaton@ywkw.ca
- Kim Decker, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Cambridge — k.decker@ywcacambridge.ca