

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Women of Toronto Say NO to Mayor Ford's War on Women and Children**

Women's organizations including Toronto Women's City Alliance (TWCA), the Immigrant Women's Health Centre, Good Jobs for All, Newcomer Women's Services Toronto, the International Women's Day Committee, Women Working with Immigrant Women, and the United Steelworkers Toronto Women's Committee representing the interests of working women, immigrant women, young women and men and children are calling for a stop to the budget cuts and for the surplus to be used to fund needed services and jobs.

Speakers at the press conference today pointed out the numerous ways that the proposed cuts to city services will impact women and children and particularly impact low-income women and their children the hardest.

Venise Antoine, a single mother of two said, "If I did not have childcare, I would not have been able to go to school and upgrade my education so I could work. Today, I have a job and can support my children because of the subsidized childcare from the city."

The city of Toronto's child care centres provide quality childcare, and the need for more affordable spaces not less is clearly evident when speaking to expecting or current parents. The budget cuts will close three child care centres in the city with a loss of about 100 spaces. Additionally, it is expected that parents who use child care centres in schools will have to pay an extra \$500-600 per year per child. Reducing affordable childcare spaces will particularly impact low-income families and single-parent households, primarily women, who already find it difficult to access affordable and accessible childcare for their children.

It is well known that more women of all ages use public transit than men of all ages. In 2006, the Toronto CMA (Census Metropolitan Area) reported that 28% of women used public transit to get to and from work compared to 17% of men, and that does not include the many other journeys that women make in a day or week. Cuts to transport disproportionately impact women, as women are concentrated in low-paying service and hospitality jobs and often cannot afford cars. To continue to cut the frequency and hours of transit services will leave women on shift work without transportation to travel between their homes and workplaces and inadvertently also put them at a higher risk of experiencing violence. Dusha Sritharan, a resident of Scarborough, "With the cuts to the bus services and the fare going up, as a young woman I am concerned about my safety. I know that I and other young women like me in Scarborough will have to wait longer for buses and walk longer distances to get home at night."

"With a \$154 million surplus in funds, this administration's demand for cuts in essential services to our city's most vulnerable is an excessive measure," says Ayesha Adhami, Admin Coordinator of the Immigrant Women's Health Centre, which has been slated for a \$200,000 cut. In particular, public health programs like the multilingual sexual health clinical services we provide reach women who otherwise don't access mainstream services."

Another growing concern for many diverse women in the city is the loss of the 21 Priority Centres. These were created at amalgamation in low-income and under-serviced neighbourhoods with the objective to gradually expand free universal access for all. Priority Centres engage youth, keep them off the streets and offer them valuable life skills. Community centres are also places where many young women and men experience their first employment opportunities. Last year the city eliminated free programmes for adults and there was 61% drop in enrollment.

The city is already considering restructuring the Welcome Policy (a youth and children's subsidy for recreation programmes across Toronto) from a program-based subsidy to a dollar-based subsidy. This will further limit the number of young people and children who can access programmes throughout the year and endanger the well-being of the next generations.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the work of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE, in their long struggle for women's rights to good jobs, pay equity and a living wage for all women and men. We encourage the city to bargain in good faith and save the jobs of our working sisters and brothers.

The city's finances are in order as it has been able to maintain its AA credit rating. Cutting and reducing these services will weaken Toronto and make it less equitable, economically weaker and environmentally costly. These cuts will cost us a lot more in the long run.

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