

<https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2024/03/18/house-report-on-preventing-human-trafficking-met-with-mixed-reviews/415220/>

## House report on preventing human trafficking met with mixed reviews

***'It's excellent that people are coming to the table and having these conversations. But we need to be more fulsome, we need to be more substantive, we need to be more concrete,' says the Joy Smith Foundation's Janet Campbell***

The House of Commons Chamber in the West Block. The House Status of Women Committee tabled a report on preventing human trafficking on Feb. 29 following an almost year-long study that heard from 55 witnesses, and received 57 written submissions.

By: Laura Ryckewaert  
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The House Status of Women Committee's recent report on preventing human trafficking is being met with mixed reviews, with some lauding it as a good step forward in tackling the issue in Canada, while others say it's thin on federal action, conflates issues, and contains gaps and contradictions.

Among those with whom *The Hill Times* spoke, Jenn Clamen, national co-ordinator of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, was the harshest critic of the committee's report, slamming it as a "hot mess."

The Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform's Jenn Clamen appeared as a virtual witness on March 27, 2023. *Screenshot courtesy of ParIVu*

The recommendations are "all over the place" and "completely misaligned," and "the report contradicts itself in so many ways, it's beyond [belief]," said Clamen, who testified as part of the study in March 2023. "It tackles so many issues that have nothing to do with trafficking, or even violence against people working in the sex industry."

The [report](#), tabled in the House of Commons on Feb. 29, is the result of an almost year-long study that began in March 2023, and contains 22 recommendations in all.

It includes calls for the federal government to improve data collection on human trafficking disaggregated by identity factors; provide "sustainable funding" to non-profits doing such

work; establish a national database; implement all of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' (MMIWG) Calls for Justice; implement a Red Dress Alert for missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people; consider a review of the application of section 213 of the Criminal Code (which was introduced through the 2014 Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act and criminalizes stopping or impeding traffic in relation to sex work); study a potential process to expunge pre-2014 convictions related to "consensual sex work"; and study measures that could help reduce poverty, including implementation of a guaranteed annual livable income (GLI), among other things.

There are also a number of recommendations on providing support and/or funding to a range of awareness campaigns, educational resources, training programs, and community-based prevention efforts—many in collaboration with provinces, territories, and Indigenous Peoples—including those targeted at youth in the child welfare and foster care system, post-secondary students, and Indigenous people involved in the sex industry. The recommendations also cover things like how to reduce vulnerability, "trauma-informed approaches" on how to differentiate between sex work and human trafficking, and "information about online safety, healthy relationships, and consent." Other recommendations that involve work with provinces and territories include a call to consider "accelerating and simplifying the process of obtaining permanent residence status from a temporary resident permit," and to reconsider immigration and refugee protection regulations that criminalize migrant sex work, as a way to "further protect migrant workers with an irregular immigration status."

Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) president Carole McBride said she's "happy" to see the result of the committee's work, and highlighted its endorsement of a GLI—which, she noted, is also one of the MMIWG's Calls for Justice—as "one of the most important" recommendations made. McBride also highlighted recommendation 11, which calls for the provision of funding to "diverse organizations and initiatives" supporting individuals involved in the sex industry, "including victims and survivors of human trafficking as well as sex workers, to ensure they have access to legal, justice, health, mental health, and addictions services."

“There’s so many of these recommendations that I see within the Calls for Justice, and you know, let’s get on with it. Put them into action,” said McBride.

The committee’s call to implement all of the MMWIG inquiry’s [Calls for Justice](#)—federal [progress on which has been slow](#) since their release in 2019—highlights five as particularly important: calls 1.3, 1.9, 3.2, 4.3, and 4.5 (on a GLI).

“There’s so much in this report, and I see there’s different places where my organization that I represent could help out, and we’re already doing some of this work, but it takes resources ... to keep on it,” said McBride, noting [NWAC’s ongoing work](#) to identify dangerous hotspots, and to offer safe places for women to turn to.

James McLean, director of research and policy with the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, commended the committee for its “thoughtful and timely report.”

“The report highlights that while human trafficking is happening across the country, government investments are not keeping pace to address it,” he said, noting that many of the recommendations cover things for which his organization has been advocating. The centre’s executive director, Julia Drydyk, appeared as a witness during the study.

In particular, McLean singled out calls for the federal government to renew the [National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking](#), which is currently in its last year, and “improve information sharing” between governments and non-profits, and noted his organization agrees “that greater investment is needed in trauma-informed and culturally relevant social services that support human trafficking victims and survivors.”

“We believe that the first step towards ending human trafficking is education,” he said.

However, one initiative he said his organization would have liked to have seen included is the establishment of a federal “advisory committee of survivor leaders who can use their lived experience to inform the government anti-trafficking efforts”—something the Trudeau government committed to when it launched the national strategy in 2019, but “unfortunately has not yet been implemented.”

Janet Campbell is president and CEO of the Joy Smith Foundation. *Photograph courtesy of the Joy Smith Foundation*

Former Manitoba Conservative MP Joy Smith, who launched the Joy Smith Foundation aimed at combatting human trafficking in 2011, said while there are “some good things” contained in the report, “it’s very thin in some other areas” and “there’s some real gaps.”

Janet Campbell, current president and CEO of the foundation, said while it’s “excellent” that a House committee is putting focus on the issue, many recommendations involve work that will have to be done by provinces and territories, and it’s “missing” any recommendation to create a venue for different levels of government to “connect and collaborate” to tackle human trafficking in Canada.

“It’s excellent that people are coming to the table and having these conversations. But we need to be more fulsome, we need to be more substantive, we need to be more concrete in the work and the actions that we take,” said Campbell.

Joy Smith was the Conservative MP for Kildonan-St. Paul, Man., from 2004-2015.

*Photograph courtesy of the Joy Smith Foundation*

Smith said the report doesn’t focus enough on the online dangers related to human trafficking, something that should have been “front and centre” in this day and age when “every kid has access to the internet,” given that “a lot of the luring of our young people happens online.” She also criticized its lack of focus on labour trafficking—saying that what is in there regarding migrant workers “doesn’t go far enough”—and its focus on supports for low-income individuals, which she said “neglects the fact that” middle- and upper-class people, including in Indigenous communities, are also vulnerable to human trafficking, as are boys.

“Anyone can be the subject of being preyed upon by traffickers,” she said.

Like McBride, both Smith and Campbell raised questions over data collection recommendations. While more data would be a boon to efforts, Smith noted the foundation has worked with close to 8,000 human trafficking survivors and their families since it

launched, and said from what they've found, there could be up to 10 times more unreported cases than "what is actually reported."

For her part, Clamen said she sees a clear Conservative tilt to the report, and highlighted a number of concerns with how it talks about sex work—for example, its repeated reference to "consensual sex work" (if it's not consensual, it's "not sex work, it's rape or violence," she said)—and how it conflates the issue of human trafficking with other important, but not necessarily connected, issues, like missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, who she noted can be, but aren't necessarily always, victims of trafficking. Related recommendations are "misplaced in a report that's attempting to address human trafficking," she argued.

The 11-member committee includes four Conservatives, including its chair, MP Karen Vecchio (Elgin–Middlesex–London, Ont.).

Committee members "were all working with very different notions of social definitions of trafficking, and what this meant was that very broad definitions were being used and that many things that were not trafficking were included in the conversation. And sex workers across the country testified to the dangers of the human-trafficking framework being one that is so broad that you can't even locate its definition, particularly the dangers for communities who are already over-policed, like Indigenous women, Black women, and migrant women, in particular," she said.

"They're talking about sex work and trafficking ... as if it's all the same, even though they claim not to do that [in the report.]"

Clamen said while the report recognizes that "not all sex work is exploitation or human trafficking," it also recommends the government "continue to support" the Harper-era Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA), which she called "the current criminal regime that defines all sex work as exploitation."

"It's extremely contradictory and problematic," she said.

On the positives, Clamen voiced support for recommendations related to the possible expungement of pre-2014 sex work convictions, reconsideration of section 213 of the Criminal Code, and the ability for migrant workers to obtain permanent resident status.

NDP MP Leah Gazan, left, with caucus colleague Blake Desjarlais at the NDP's convention in Hamilton, Ont., on Oct. 15, 2023. Gazan has been pushing for creation of a Red Dress Alert, and a national strategy on a guaranteed annual livable income. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Two of the committee's calls—on implementing a Red Dress Alert, and considering a GLI—directly connect with work NDP MP Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, Man.), a member of the committee, has been championing in Parliament. Gazan currently has a private member's bill, [C-223](#), calling for the development of a national framework for a GLI. Originally tabled in December 2021, it finally got on to the order of precedence last month, and Gazan told *The Hill Times* she's expecting debate at second reading to begin in early May.

"We know there's a direct correlation between violence and income, and so if this government is really serious about addressing the crisis we are experiencing in gender-based violence, then I hope they will support my bill," Gazan said.

Independent Senator Kim Pate (Ontario) introduced an identical public bill in December 2021, [Bill S-233](#), which reached the committee stage last fall after a lengthy second-reading debate, but faces [opposition from Senate Conservatives](#).

Gazan has long advocated for creation of a Red Dress Alert, and has been involved in federal consultations launched last fall on the development of such an alert—something the Trudeau government committed funds to in the 2023 federal budget, which carved out \$2.5-million over five years for the establishment of a federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous roundtable on MMIWG to, among other things, discuss launching a Red Dress Alert.

Neither Gazan nor Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu (Thunder Bay–Superior North, Ont.) provided timing in response to *The Hill Times'* question regarding when consultations

would wrap up, but in an email, Hajdu's press secretary, Matthieu Perrotin, said creating such an alert "is a key and urgent priority for our government." Perrotin noted that since last November, 16 "engagements" have been "hosted" on the creation of an alert, including [an early February gathering](#) of Indigenous leaders, partners, and federal, provincial, and territorial ministers.

McLean highlighted his centre's toll-free Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, which aims to help survivors of human trafficking, and their family and friends, access support: 1-833-900-1010.

### **Highlights of the Status of Women Committee's recommendations**

*The House Status of Women Committee's Feb. 29 [report](#) includes 22 recommendations which have been condensed and summarized below.*

- Amend federal "anti-trafficking laws, policies, and programs to differentiate between consensual sex work, sex trafficking, and sexual exploitation of minors"; and ensure all new and existing federal policies "clearly define the concept within human trafficking," including whether it's for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- Improve data collection on human trafficking to ensure the process is "culturally safe and trauma-informed"; that data is "disaggregated by identity factors, including disability, race, Indigenous identity, sexuality," and immigration status; and continue providing "sustainable funding" to non-profits collecting data on human trafficking.
- Support Statistics Canada in establishing a national database with standardized information on perpetrators.
- Support organizations working with youth in the child welfare and foster care systems to ensure services are culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, and "reduce their vulnerability to becoming victims of human trafficking."
- Support the development of "awareness campaigns and resources" on preventing and reducing the risk of human trafficking "in diverse languages for international post-secondary students."
- Support organizations providing "culturally relevant, age appropriate" youth education and awareness about human trafficking and exploitation that "includes information

about online safety, health relationships, and consent”; and support “evidence-based prevention community initiatives focused on children and youth” aged six to 18.

- Implement a Red Dress Alert for missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people.
- Implement all Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, in particular calls 1.3, 1.9, 3.2, 4.3, and 4.5.
- Work with provinces and territories to “implement measures to further protect migrant workers with an irregular immigration status” from human trafficking, exploitation, and workplace abuse, and consider: “accelerating and simplifying the process of obtaining permanent residence status from a temporary resident permit,” and “studying the potential repeal or amendment” of immigration and refugee protection regulations that criminalize migrant worker sex work.
- Consider “undertaking a thorough review” of the application of section 213 of the Criminal Code with regard “to vulnerable people ... involved in the sex industry,” and study “a possible process to expunge pre-2014 convictions related to consensual sex work.”
- Consider “measures that can reduce poverty and ensure” basic needs are met, including “implementing a guaranteed annual livable income or other financial support models,” and “supporting the provision of safe, affordable, and accessible housing.”
- Collaborate with provinces, territories, and Indigenous Peoples to fund “diverse organizations and initiatives that support individuals” involved in the sex industry, “including victims and survivors of human trafficking” to ensure access “to adequate legal, justice, health, mental health, and addictions services.”
- Collaborate with “provinces, territories, Indigenous Peoples, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, non-governmental organizations, schools, and community groups” to support “comprehensive public awareness and education programs aimed at raising awareness about human trafficking, its signs, and its impact”; and ensure educational resources and training programs are distributed to “vulnerable populations, law enforcement agencies, and frontline service providers.”
- Support programs providing training for people who work with victims of sex trafficking “to include trauma-informed approaches on how to recognize the



difference between sex work and human trafficking,” and work with provinces, territories, and Indigenous Peoples to ensure human trafficking awareness training for law enforcement “includes information about the distinction between consensual sex work and human trafficking.”

- Consult and collaborate with “provinces, territories, Indigenous Peoples, and municipalities” on renewing the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking for 2024.
- Develop “an awareness campaign about the signs of human trafficking and the supports and services available for victims and survivors” and “encourage” implementation in “all federally regulated workplaces,” and “work with provinces and territories to encourage the development of similar campaigns.”