

Advocacy Report

By Ruth Kennedy

One resolution was passed by the FWIO Board at their April session.

- That the FWIO urge the Federal Government to compensate stay-at-home parents in the form of a tax rebate equal to the government subsidized day care.

Notes: The Federal Government has pledged \$5 billion over five years for a national child care system, with \$700 million being allocated the first two years. This money is to be delivered through the provinces. Their plan would allow private and not-for-profit operations to exist, and would bar provinces and territories from directing any of the new federal funds to stay-at-home parents.

A Statistics Canada study reported that 47% of Canadian children between the ages of six months and five years are cared for by stay-at-home parents. Often this is not by choice. In the case of many rural women, day care is not an option. Is this discrimination? Some form of tax rebate for these parents would help to compensate them for less income.

Values, morals and good citizenship are usually better taught by parents than by non-related workers in day care. Once again, calls or letters to your MP or MPP will help the cause. If there is an election soon, this money may be lost.

A resolution on the use of Sharia Law in the justice system of Ontario is in progress. The Attorney General for Ontario asked Marion Boyd, a former Justice Minister, to review the practice of Sharia Law in Ontario. Her report indicated that under the 1991 Arbitration Act, the practice of Sharia Law is following Ontario laws.

An MPP has written the following: "As it stands, arbitration services that propose to use Sharia Law to decide disputes

are not courts. They are private dispute resolution facilities run by individuals or community groups. They do not receive government funding or sanction. The government does not license, approve or regulate these facilities. The law does not require people to take their civil disputes to court if they do not want to do so. In private matters, people are free to act according to the principles of their choice, without interference from the state, as long as they do not break the law in doing so. The Premier has asked the Attorney General and the Minister responsible for Women's Issues and their officials to work toward ensuring that women (and in particular, Islamic women) are aware of their rights under Canadian Law, including arbitrations, and that educational materials are available in appropriate languages."

Amendments to the Arbitration Act have given Sharia Law new powers. Once an arbitrator decides cases, it is final and binding. The parties can go to the local secular Canadian court asking that it be enforced. The court has no discretion in the matter. Sharia Law varies widely. The one common denominator is that it is strongly patriarchal. Women have few rights. As is suggested above, language is often a barrier to their understanding of what rights could be available to them under Canadian law.

Ali Hogben, President of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, a pro-faith group with members from every Muslim culture, said the Council was never

consulted about the new Sharia courts, and it strongly opposes them. They are lobbying hard for Ontario to change the arbitration law. Ontario is one of the few jurisdictions where Sharia Law is allowed.

Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, article 15 states: "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability." The Arbitration Act, by permitting the use of faith-based arbitration for family legal matters in private courts has denied Canadians from religious communities, and particularly women and children, the full protection of Canadian law.

The proposed resolution simply asks that the 1991 Arbitration Act be amended to make all people of Ontario equal and subject to the Family Law Act of Ontario. Once again, I encourage each of you to support our sustained resolutions by lobbying your government officials on the topics.

Have a great summer everyone!

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Brightening the January Blues

Lookout Bay WI President Kathy Hall had a great idea! Left over clothing donated from a yard sale and an invitation to dinner to brighten everyone's January "blues" resulted in the creation of two unique queen-size quilts. The quilts were donated to the Hawkesbury and Vankleek Hill Food Banks. Shown from left to right at one of the quilt presentations are Joyce Tanquay, Olive Lalonde, Carol Bouchard (Treasurer, Food Bank), Kathy Hall, Nicole Michalchuk, Ethelda Boa and Lucie Seguin.



Submitted by Ethelda Boa, PRO, Lookout Bay WI, Prescott, Eastern Area.