

# FEMINIST LAW REFORM MANUAL



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**How You Can  
Influence  
Canadian Laws**



Celebrating the Legacy  
Célébrer l'héritage



Defining the Future  
Définir l'avenir



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This manual was primarily authored by Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs for the National Association of Women and the Law. It was completed in 2024.

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For questions, reach out to [contact@nawl.ca](mailto:contact@nawl.ca).



## About this guide

Feminist law reform encompasses various ways to influence laws and policies. In its broad sense, feminist law reform includes strategic litigation (influencing the interpretation of laws by participating in court cases), participation in UN or other international mechanisms, as well as attempts to influence government policy and regulation at different levels. This guide focuses on how to influence the passing of laws during the federal legislative process. With minor adjustments, the information in this guide can be applied to provincial or territorial lawmaking. To learn more about feminist law reform, visit NAWL's free online course: <http://course.nawl.ca/>.

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# Part 1

## Understanding the landscape



### 1.1 Feminist Law Reform: What is it and who is it for?

Feminist law reform is a comprehensive and ongoing effort to reshape legal systems and frameworks to address gender-based inequalities and promote gender equality. It seeks to challenge and transform laws, policies, and practices that perpetuate discrimination and disadvantage against women and gender-diverse individuals, including disadvantages most felt by individuals experiencing multiple discriminations (such as Black, racialized, Indigenous and disabled women and gender-diverse people).

Engaging in feminist law reform recognizes that many legal systems have historically favoured men's rights and perspectives, leaving women and non-binary individuals disadvantaged in areas such as family law, employment, violence prevention, and reproductive rights.

Feminist law reform aims to achieve several key objectives. One is to increase women's participation in the lawmaking process. Ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard, that decision makers are informed by experts and by people with lived experience on issues affecting women and gender-diverse individuals, and that feminist organizations have the tools to engage in different types of consultation processes is likely to lead to better laws.



More broadly, feminist law reform seeks to eliminate legal barriers that prevent women from fully participating in various aspects of society. This involves addressing discriminatory laws that limit women's access to education, employment opportunities, and political representation. For instance, reform efforts might focus on equal pay for equal work, combating workplace harassment, or ensuring adequate parental leave policies. Reforms also aim at making the justice system fairer and more accessible to women, including by providing better access to legal aid.

Another important objective of feminist law reform involves addressing violence against women and gender-based violence. Canadian laws have often failed to adequately protect survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Reform advocates work to strengthen laws and policies that hold perpetrators accountable while providing survivors with support and resources. This may include improving police response, enhancing protection orders, and establishing specialized courts to handle gender-based violence cases.

Feminist law reform also tackles issues within family law and reproductive rights. Historically, these areas of law have reinforced traditional gender roles and inequalities. Reform efforts aim to create fair and equitable structures for divorce, child custody, and property distribution. Additionally, advocates seek to ensure reproductive autonomy by advocating for accessible and affordable contraception, abortion services, and comprehensive sex education.



In the realm of criminal justice, feminist law reform pushes for reforms in areas such as the treatment of female offenders, the recognition of abused women's self-defence, and the prevention of violence and harassment within prisons. These efforts recognize the unique challenges faced by women and non-binary individuals in the criminal justice system. Some feminist law reforms aim to reform the criminal justice system, while others seek to eliminate it, promoting other forms of accountability for perpetrators of gender-based violence. Black and Indigenous communities, in particular, have worked to develop community responses to gender-based-violence outside the colonial legal system.

Feminist law reformers use various strategies to influence the law. These include advocating for new legislation or changes to current laws, challenging discriminatory practices through litigation, conducting research to highlight gender disparities, and engaging in public awareness campaigns. Collaborations with other social justice movements, including organizations advancing racial justice, economic equality, accessibility, or reconciliation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities are also common, as intersectionality acknowledges the interconnected nature of various forms of discrimination.

While lawyers and law students can certainly play a crucial role in feminist law reform, this activity is not limited to legal professionals. Law reform initiatives undergo public consultation. Non-lawyers can participate by providing feedback, suggestions, and insights that policymakers might not have considered.



Indeed, because laws affect every aspect of society, the legislative process benefits from receiving inputs from people with various backgrounds and unique perspectives shaped by their experiences. Direct stakeholders, civil society organizations and even individuals have specific expertise that must be shared with lawmakers to ensure that new laws address their needs and concerns. For example, expertise or lived experience in healthcare, technology, environmental protection, or gender-based violence is often invaluable.

Moreover, law reform efforts often require widespread public support to gain momentum and succeed. Non-lawyers can play a vital role in raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and building public pressure for change. Additionally, while the law can be a tool for social change, it does not function in isolation. Non-lawyers can help make new laws better known in their communities so they can be utilized to their full potential. Finally, law reform is, at its core, a democratic process. Involving a wide range of individuals ensures that the laws that govern society are shaped by and accountable to the people they affect.



## 1.2 How laws are passed in Canada

In Canada, new laws are created, or old laws are removed (“revoked”) or changed (“amended”) through bills. To become laws, bills must be passed both by the House of Commons (also called the lower Chamber, comprised of elected representatives) and by the Senate (also called the upper Chamber, comprised of individuals appointed until their 75th birthday). Bills passed by both Chambers receive royal assent from the Governor General—a formality—before officially becoming law.

House of Commons bills go through the House of Commons and are then sent to the Senate, while Senate bills start in the upper Chamber before being passed by the House of Commons. The bill must go through three readings in the original Chamber, then go through three readings in the other Chamber.

Here is an explanation of the formal parliamentary process for the adoption of a bill:

### First Chamber

- **First reading:** The process begins when a Member of Parliament (MP) or a senator introduces a bill.
- **Second Reading:** During the second reading, the general principles of the bill are debated. Members discuss the overall idea behind the bill rather than its details. A vote is taken at the end of the debate. If the bill passes the second reading, it moves to the next stage by being referred to committee for further study.
- **Consideration at Committee:** The bill is referred to a committee composed of a limited number of MPs or senators that generally proportionally represent the recognized parties or parliamentary groups of the Chamber. Committees generally hold hearings and invite witnesses, which may be individual experts or organizations, to provide comments on the bill. Members of the public can also present briefs for consideration by the committee. The committee will then move on to the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. During that process, the committee goes through each part of the bill in more detail than at other stages and votes on whether each clause should remain in the bill as well as on amendments proposed by its members. **This stage is the one most suited for interventions by feminist law reformers.**

At the end of the process, the committee votes on the bill as a whole, as amended. On rare occasions, a committee recommends abandoning the bill or decides not to proceed with the consideration of a bill; however, the power to decide whether the bill should be studied further or abandoned lies with the House of Commons as a whole.

It is also important to know that amendments made to the bill by the committee must respect certain constraints. Among other things, amendments must be within the scope and principle of the bill; that is, they cannot go beyond what the bill is trying to achieve. Amendments also cannot impose costs on the Public Treasury. The Chair of the committee rules on whether amendments are admissible or not.

In addition to amending the bill, the committee may make observations in its report, for example, calling on the Government to take action and highlighting some of the concerns shared by witnesses.

A list of [House of Commons](#) and [Senate](#) committees can be found on these institutions' respective websites.

- **Report stage:** At this stage, all members of the Chamber have the opportunity to propose further amendments to the bill, in which case these amendments are debated and voted on. Amendments at this stage are less common than during the committee's clause-by-clause consideration. No debate is held at this stage if no amendment is proposed.
- **Third reading:** The Chamber can then debate the bill as a whole, as amended, and vote on whether to adopt it.

## **Second Chamber**

A bill that is adopted at third reading moves to the other Chamber. The bill then goes through the same process until it passes the third reading stage. If the bill is passed without amendments, it is ready for royal assent (approval by the Governor General or another designated representative of the Crown).

It is unusual for a government bill to be defeated in the Senate, but a relevant example of the role the Senate can play in feminist law reform is the defeat of Bill C-43 in 1991. After the Supreme Court ruled that the provisions which criminalized abortion were unconstitutional in the 1988 *R v Morgentaler* decision, the governing Progressive Conservatives introduced Bill C-43, which made it a criminal offence to induce an abortion unless it was done by a physician who considered that the woman's life or health was at risk. The bill was adopted in the House of Commons, but it was defeated in the Senate by a tied vote.

## When the second Chamber amends the bill

The process is a little bit different if the second Chamber amends the bill because a bill can only become law if it has been approved in the same form by the two Chambers.

When the Senate amends a House of Commons bill, it is sent back to the House of Commons through a “message”, which is the vehicle for official communications regarding bills between the two Chambers. The message contains the amendments that were passed by the Senate. There are three possible responses that the House of Commons can give:

1. The House of Commons agrees with the amendments: the bill can proceed to royal assent.
2. The House of Commons disagrees with the amendments: the Senate can either insist or not insist on the amendments. If the Senate does not insist, the bill can proceed to royal assent. If the Senate insists, the bill cannot proceed to royal assent.
3. The House of Commons further amends the Senate amendments: the Senate must then respond by agreeing to the amendments, disagreeing with them, or further amending them.

Senators are sometimes hesitant to amend a bill that was already passed by the House of Commons, since that will delay its adoption. It is important for feminist law reformers to focus their efforts on the first Chamber, especially when the issue is perceived as urgent.

The House of Commons can combine these responses, by agreeing with some but not all amendments.

A similar process applies when it is the House of Commons that amends a Senate Bill.

Messages are sent between the Chambers to set out which amendments are accepted, disagreed with or further amended, until there is agreement. Because the legislative process is already a long one, it is rare for Chambers to insist on several rounds of messages. There is even a process for Chambers to resolve disputes through a “Free Conference”, but the last one was held in 1947.

In case of disagreement, one of the Chambers must cave to the other; it is likely that this Chamber will be the Senate, deciding not to insist on its amendment and recognizing the stronger legitimacy of the elected representatives of the House of Commons.



## When do bills come into force?

A bill that receives royal assent comes into force that same day, on a date specified in the bill, or on another day to be fixed by an order of the Governor in Council, if that is what the bill provides for.





Information on when the bill comes into force is generally found at the end of the bill (but before schedules). Different sections may come into force at different dates, as in this example from Bill C-21, *An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms)*:

### Coming into Force

#### Order in council

73 (1) Subsections 5(1) and (2) and sections 9.1, 15, 16, 20, 21.2, 26 to 29, 32 to 36, 38, 40, 41 and 45 come into force on a day or days to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council.

#### 30th day after royal assent

(1.1) Subsections 3(2) and 13(1.1) come into force on the 30th day after the day on which this Act receives royal assent.

#### Order in council

(2) Sections 49 to 51 come into force on a day to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council.

### Regulations

A bill may provide for the development of regulations after the bill is passed. The regulations associated with a bill may occasionally be as important as the bill itself, since they operationalize the adopted legislation. Consultations around regulations are sometimes mandatory and provide important opportunities for ensuring that the interpretation of the legislation aligns with the goals of law reformers. Regulations must be published in the Canada Gazette, as must information about mandatory consultation periods when regulations are in a drafting stage.

### Why bills fail to pass

Bills can fail to become law because they are defeated by a vote at any reading. Additionally, a bill can also “die on the order paper” because the session or Parliament ended before its adoption. The order in which bills are brought up for debate depends on the government agenda and on cooperation by opposition parties and senators. Thus, feminist law reform efforts sometimes focus on getting a bill to progress faster, by pressuring MPs or senators not to amend a bill or by pressuring the government or opposition parties to accelerate its study.

## 1.3 The different types of Bills

A list of all current bills and their status can be found on the website of the [Parliament of Canada](#). The [Library of Parliament](#) provides summaries, which can be very useful to better understand what a bill is about.

Bills that originate in the House of Commons are called House of Commons bills and start with C-, for example, Bill C-21. Bills that originate in the Senate are called Senate bills and start with S-, for example, Bill S-12.

Bills are numbered in chronological order as they are introduced. Government bills are numbered 2 to 200, regardless of whether they are introduced in the House of Commons or in the Senate (which is less common). For example, Bill S-12 is a government bill introduced in the Senate.

When a bill is presented by an individual (a Senate “public bill” or a House of Commons “private member’s bill”), it receives a number between 201 and 1000. Members of opposition parties often introduce these bills, some of which end up being adopted. However, these bills can also be introduced while knowing they will not be adopted to garner media attention and put pressure on the government to act or take a position on an issue.

Finally, some bills do not address matters of public interest but rather matters that relate to an individual or a small group of people. These bills, which are rare and unlikely to be of interest to feminist law reformers, receive numbers 10001 and up.

In general, government bills are the most likely to be adopted because the Government is the party which has the most seats (and hence votes) in the House of Commons. However, government bills can be defeated by other parties in a minority government, that is, in a government where the party in power does not hold a majority of the seats.

For this reason, feminist law reformers may want to pay particular attention to this type of bill. Because government business receives more time in sitting sessions, it is also likely to progress more quickly.

BILL NUMBER	BILL LETTER:	BILL LETTER:
	C	S
1	At the start of each session, Bill C-1 is always called <i>An Act respecting the Administration of Oaths of Office</i> .	At the start of each session, Bill S-1 is always called <i>An Act relating to Railways</i>
2 to 200	House of Commons government bills	Senate government bills
201 to 1,000	House of Commons private members' bills	Senate public bills
1,001+	House of Commons private bills	Senate private bills

Source : [Senate of Canada](#)  
<https://sencanada.ca/en/sencaplus/how-why/whats-your-number-how-parliament-numbers-its-legislation/>



## 1.4 When are bills considered and passed?

The House of Commons only sits on certain days; its sitting calendar can be found [on the website of the Parliament of Canada](#). The Senate also has its [sitting schedule](#). Committees often have specific meeting times, although they can be changed. Ask the clerk of the committee you are interested in for information about future committee meetings.

There is limited time in a Parliament (roughly the period of government between two elections) or in a session (a Parliament can be divided into several sessions, but there may also be a single session in a Parliament) to deal with matters of government. At the end of a session (by “prorogation”), all government bills that have not received royal assent cease to exist (unless they are later reintroduced or reinstated). At the end of a Parliament (by “dissolution”), all bills, whether government or from a private member, are terminated. Thus, law reform advocacy may be unsuccessful not because a bill was defeated, but because it died before being adopted. For this reason, it is important to get a sense of the timing for the adoption of a bill. MPs and senators may share that type of information with you.

Adopting bills takes a long time, although some bills, with sufficient government and Senate will and sense of urgency, can be expedited. For example, on June 23rd, 2022, Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (self-induced extreme intoxication) was adopted; the Bill had only been introduced on June 17th. This is an exceptional case of an expedited bill, as there were no substantive committee studies of the bill before its adoption. It is more usual for bills to take many months to be adopted. At another extreme, Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms) was introduced on May 30th, 2022 and was only adopted in December 2023. Both extremes pose different difficulties for feminist law reformers trying to influence the legislative process.

At every Parliament, there are a number of bills that will never get through the full legislative process; this is especially the case for private members' bills (in the House of Commons) or public bills (in the Senate). This is because the governing party is allocated more time and has more control over parliamentary proceedings. It is thus important for feminist law reformers to allocate their resources to bills that are more likely to be passed.

Most of the House of Commons' sitting time is allocated to Government orders, which includes consideration of government bills (both House of Commons and Senate bills). The government decides which items to bring for debate; therefore, issues that are of high priority for the government move through the process quicker. Certain sitting days are devoted to opposition parties; on these days, the opposition parties control the agenda. Moreover, one hour per sitting day is allocated to Private Members' Business. During that hour, a single bill or motion by a member of the House of Commons who is not a minister or parliamentary secretary will be considered.

A typical sitting day is structured as follows:

## Daily Order of Business

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Time
10:00		Routine Proceedings		Routine Proceedings	Government Orders	10:00
10:30						10:30
11:00	Private Members' Business				Statements by Members	11:00
11:30					Oral Questions	11:30
12:00	Government Orders	Government Orders		Government Orders	Routine Proceedings	12:00
12:30					Government Orders	12:30
1:00			Review of Delegated Legislation*			1:00
1:30					Private Members' Business	1:30
2:00	Statements by Members	Statements by Members	Statements by Members	Statements by Members		2:00
2:30	Oral Questions	Oral Questions	Oral Questions	Oral Questions		2:30
3:00	Routine Proceedings		Routine Proceedings			3:00
3:30			Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers			3:30
4:00	Government Orders	Government Orders		Government Orders		4:00
4:30			Government Orders			4:30
5:00						5:00
5:30						5:30
6:00		Private Members' Business	Private Members' Business	Private Members' Business		6:00
6:30						6:30
7:00	Adjournment Proceedings	Adjournment Proceedings	Adjournment Proceedings	Adjournment Proceedings		7:00

The [website of the Parliament of Canada](#) shows the projected order of business for the next sitting day.

Which private member's business will be considered during the time allocated for such business is determined by a draw that takes place at the start of each new Parliament after a general election to determine the "order of precedence". Thirty members are chosen and will be able to put forward a bill or a motion for consideration. It is unlikely that the House of Commons will go through all these items. Therefore, a bill that is identified as "outside the order of precedence" will likely never make it to second reading. When interested in advocating on a Private Member's Bill, make sure to check if it is within or outside the order of precedence by checking the webpage of the bill.

You can often safely ignore a private member's bill that is "outside the order of precedence". It likely will not be studied until the end of the Parliament. However, if the bill is particularly important to you, do occasionally check on its status in case it is added to the order of precedence.

In the Senate too, government business has priority and receives more time. Other business including Senate Public Bills are called in an order determined by several criteria, including how long it has been since an item was last debated. The Order Paper and Notice Paper, [published on the website of the Senate](#), can be consulted to find out which bills are going to be discussed on the next sitting day. Feminist law reformers interested in a particular bill can reach out to the Senate sponsor of the bill (their name can be found on the webpage for the bill, either by looking at the sponsor indicated if it's a Senate bill, or by checking who did the sponsor's speech at second reading in the Senate in the "Details" tab).

**C-50** 44th Parliament, 1st session  
November 22, 2021, to present

An Act respecting accountability, transparency and engagement to support the creation of sustainable jobs for workers and economic growth in a net-zero economy

Short title: Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act

**Bill type**  
House Government Bill

**Sponsor**  
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

**Text of the bill**

**Summary**

**Current status**  
At report stage in the House of Commons

**Latest activity**  
Committee report presented on December 11, 2023 (House of Commons)

**Progress** Details About

**Legislative summary**  
A [legislative summary](#) of this bill is available from the Library of Parliament.

**Similar bills**  
No similar bills were introduced during previous sessions or Parliaments

**Departmental information**

**Press releases**  
[Government of Canada Tables the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act to Enable the Creation of Good, Middle-Class Jobs Across Canada \(2023-06-15 | Department of Natural Resources\)](#)

**Background information**  
[Backgrounder: Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act \(2023-06-15 | Department of Natural Resources\)](#)  
[Charter Statement - Bill C-50: An Act respecting accountability, transparency and engagement to support the creation of sustainable jobs for workers and economic growth in a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions economy. \(Tabled 2023-09-20\)](#)

**Progress** Details About

**House of Commons**

**First reading**  
Completed on June 15, 2023

**Second reading**  
Completed on October 23, 2023

**Consideration in committee**  
Completed on December 11, 2023

**Report stage**  
No activity

**Third reading**  
Not reached

**Senate**

**First reading**  
Not reached

**Second reading**  
Not reached

**Third reading**  
Not reached

**Progress** Details About

**Recorded votes**

**House of Commons**

**Vote 427** – October 19, 2023 **Result:** Agree  
Time allocation for Bill C-50, An Act respecting accountability, transparency and engagement to support the creation of sustainable jobs for workers and economic growth in a net-zero economy  
**Yeas:** 175 **Nays:** 146 **Paired:** 0 **Total:** 321

**Vote 428** – October 23, 2023 **Result:** Agree  
2nd reading of Bill C-50, An Act respecting accountability, transparency and engagement to support the creation of sustainable jobs for workers and economic growth in a net-zero economy  
**Yeas:** 175 **Nays:** 144 **Paired:** 6 **Total:** 325

**Senate**  
To view the complete list of standing votes that have taken place in the S please refer to the [Votes](#) page of the [Senate of Canada](#) website.

# Part 2

## Law reform activities: whom to influence and how



Activities undertaken to shape legislation and policy can be roughly divided in three types: public advocacy, participation in consultations, and lobbying. These activities all seek to persuade politicians and other public office holders, but they rely on different tools and are subject to different requirements.

### 2.1 The actors

Enacting new legislation is a process that involves various office holders. The most visible are the elected politicians, who are ultimately responsible for passing bills. But MPs, especially those who are Cabinet ministers, are supported by both the bureaucracy in the public service and the political staff of the government. These officials can facilitate or create obstacles for the adoption of legislation. It is therefore important for feminist law reformers to understand the policy landscape and identify, whenever possible, influential players. Those players include ministers and other members of Parliament as well as senators, but also political staffers such as the directors of policy and the executive assistants to the minister, and public officials like directors, deputy ministers, and, occasionally, subject-matter experts within government departments.

Each bill has a sponsor in each Chamber. The sponsor is the MP or the senator who introduces the bill and generally defends it. The bill also has a critic, from the opposition party (in the House) or other affiliation (in the Senate), whose speeches may call on their colleagues not to adopt the bill. These are important players, and meeting with them or reading their speeches can give feminist law reformers relevant information by revealing the major issues of contention with the bill and how controversial it is (some bills will be supported by all parties or affiliations).

Government bills are sponsored by Ministers. However, the Ministers will not necessarily have the time and availability to meet with feminist law reformers or work on the details of a bill. Therefore, it may be more effective to meet with their Parliamentary Secretary – an MP who assists them on the file – and/or with their staff, such as their Director of Policy. For MPs who are not Ministers, you should try to meet with them directly, rather than only with their staff, but meetings with staff members can also be effective, especially to follow up or work on the details of proposed amendments. Senators who are sponsors, critics, or members of the relevant committee should also be available to meet with you.

Whether they are sponsoring new bills or proposing amendments, MPs and senators receive the assistance of their Chamber's respective Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, whose legislative drafters ensure that technical drafting standards are maintained and that bills and amendments are bilingual. Drafters advise on what an amendment or legislative clause means and how it could be changed. Because MPs and senators are not necessarily lawyers, they are likely to defer to the advice they receive by the drafters. This may be reassuring to know if you are not a lawyer or are worried about proposing legislative language that may be technically deficient – everything that ends up in a bill has been thoroughly reviewed.





## 2.2 Public advocacy

Public advocacy encompasses activities that seek to raise issues of importance for Canadians. These activities are crucial to get a specific issue to receive legislative attention and are part of a proactive approach to law reform. The goal is to set the agenda and have the government react to needs that you have identified as a priority. This is difficult because you are competing with many other priorities and interest groups. Governments do not have the time to fix an unlimited number of problems, so it is crucial to demonstrate wide support and create a sense of urgency and priority for your issue.

Parliament sometimes introduces a bill in response to a Court decision. In particular, a decision declaring an existing law to be unconstitutional may prompt legislative action to adopt a new law that is constitutional. Therefore, strategic litigation—going through the courts to try to have a law or part of a law declared unconstitutional—can be a useful law reform strategy. However, strategic litigation also has its challenges. In particular, it tends to take many years and be highly expensive.

Engaging the public and the media is crucial. You must raise awareness among the public and media about the issue, using various communication channels to explain the problem and mobilize relevant constituencies. Public engagement campaigns can include creating a Parliamentary petition sponsored by an MP, an online petition, or a letter writing campaign, and are effective if you can get a high level of engagement from the public. For that, you will need to engage with your network and ideally work in coalition with different groups to help expand your reach. Writing Op-Eds can also give more visibility to your issue and raise awareness. You will find more information about how to use these tools in Part 3 of this manual.

You can target your public advocacy campaign at the party in power, or, alternatively, you can attempt to gather support from all parties by framing your issue as so important it transcends partisan politics. The same issue can generally be presented in different ways to align your proposed solution with your interlocutor's values. For example, you can talk to liberals about universal basic income by emphasizing coherence with values of care with the vulnerable, and talk to conservatives on the same issue using the narrative of the ineffective and overly bureaucratic state and the need to simplify government assistance. Issues of violence against women can often appeal to all parties if framed appropriately, including by emphasizing the party's previous engagement with or leadership on this issue. You can also try to make your issue an election issue and get parties to publicly commit to fixing a problem if elected.



It is important to know that persuading politicians to introduce and pass a bill requires sustained pressure over a long period of time; a one-off campaign may not be sufficient. Make sure your group is solid and resourced enough to embark on that kind of marathon. You might need to spend years building consensus. For example, people advocating for a law criminalizing coercive control have organized conferences, spoken to the media, gotten an opposition party to introduce bills, met with numerous MPs and senators to get them on board, etc. Even if there is a consensus among politicians about the need to act, it can still take months or years before a government bill becomes law.

While running your advocacy campaign, keep an eye out for unusual opportunities to tack on your issue to existing processes. For example, the campaign to change the law regarding publication bans got accelerated when its leader was able to testify before a House of Commons committee that was doing a study on victims' rights. The legislative changes that were advocated for were then tacked on to an urgent bill on another criminal law issue that needed to be adopted quickly to respond to a Supreme Court decision within a given timeline. As another example, Quebec advocates working to improve victims' rights

in relation to sexual violence in postsecondary institutions have been able to get an important change added to a seemingly unrelated bill dealing with confidentiality of personal information. Working with lawyers and keeping a close eye on activities in Parliament can likewise help you get results faster.

Remember that proactive law reform requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration, communication, and perseverance. It is important to adapt your strategies based on the political and social context and to remain flexible in your approach.



## 2.3 Participating in public consultations

### Participating in consultations before a bill is introduced

Before adopting significant policy and legislative changes, governments often consult relevant stakeholders. Participating in those public consultations can help feminist law reformers shape the discussion around a specific issue, as well as the government's approach to address it.

At any point, the federal government may have hundreds of consultation processes open. A list of current consultation is available on the [Government's website](#). The list can be filtered to find consultation that may be relevant for feminist law reformers. Additionally, a government department may announce on its website that it is holding consultations on a specific topic. That department may contact you to ask you to participate in the consultation, for example by submitting a brief or taking part in an online meeting with other organizations from your sector. If you see that consultations are taking place, reach out to the designated contact on the announcement or to the relevant Minister's office, and ask to be invited.

The government may also conduct informal consultations, in which case you may simply receive an email or phone call asking you to join a meeting to express your opinion on a specific topic. Try to get as much information on the topic of the meeting before attending, so you can come prepared, and follow up as needed with additional information after your conversation.

### Getting a bill amended during a committee's study of the bill

Getting a bill amended during the committee's clause-by-clause study is probably the most effective way to influence the legislative process. When feminist law reformers act at this stage, they are unable to control the legislative agenda, as their proposed changes must be within the scope of bills that Parliament is already considering. Nonetheless, getting an existing bill amended can be an effective damage control strategy, when the bill is detrimental but cannot be stopped. This process can also enable feminist law reformers to get easy wins, by proposing uncontroversial tweaks that make the law more responsive to women's needs.

It is relatively easy to have an impact at this stage because there is an existing process of consultation and amendment. Sometimes, the party who has introduced the bill is open to amending it to improve the bill and garner support from feminist groups. However, recall that amendments must be within the scope of what the bill intends to do, and they cannot directly require the state to expend funds.

Bills are studied and amended by committees after second reading. Feminist law reformers should keep an eye on the progress of any bill they are interested in to figure out when they pass second reading and are referred to a committee. The webpage [Legislation at a glance](#) on the Parliament's website provides an overview of the stage that all current bills are at. Feminist law reformers should read the bill carefully and determine what changes they would like to see. It can be useful to work with a lawyer to develop proposed amendments; however, this is not necessary. Getting a clear sense of the problems and proposed solutions is enough. It is important to keep in mind that not all social problems are going to be fixed in a single bill. Focusing on a few targeted changes will give you better chances of success.

Once a bill is assigned to a committee and once you have determined what changes you would like to see, there are three main ways to get involved to try to get the bill amended. Feminist law reformers should try to participate in these three ways if they are able to. Talking to the media or writing op-eds is also a relevant strategy to try to influence the legislative process, although there tends to be limited media attention devoted to the committee stage of the legislative process, unless the bill is especially important and/or controversial.

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### 1) Submitting a brief

Everyone can submit a brief to a committee, regardless of whether they have been invited to testify. Write a clear and concise document that explains your suggested amendments and why they are important. Use facts and examples to support your points, and make yourself available to answer questions by providing your contact information.

You will submit your brief to the committee clerk, and they will circulate it to all committee members. However, you may also want to send it directly to committee members, individually, offering to answer any questions and/or requesting a meeting to discuss.

The House of Commons or Senate will translate your brief from English to French or from French to English if you do not submit it in both languages. When you send the brief to MPs, send it either in both languages, or in their language of choice. You can find out what language an MP or senator speaks by watching previous committee meetings where they intervened.

See “How to write a great brief” in [Part 3](#) of this manual for more tips.

### 2) Testifying at committee

Once the bill is assigned to a committee, reach out to the committee clerk (you will find their email address on the committee’s website) to ask when the committee hearings will take place and signal your interest in being invited to testify as a witness. The list of witnesses is negotiated between the members of the committee, so you should also reach out to a few members of the committee to ask to be invited. Reach out individually to members who are likely to support your position, including opposition parties, and briefly state your credentials and what you would hope to testify about. Offer to meet with them to discuss the bill and your suggestions.

If you are invited to testify, it will likely be on short notice. If the proposed date and time does not work for you, you can ask the committee clerk if there are other options, but often options are limited. You can testify remotely (they will mail you an approved headset) or in person (they will cover your travel costs). Testifying in person is generally preferable, if feasible because it allows you to linger after the committee meeting to shake hands with committee members.

You will receive a strict time limit for your testimony, generally 5 minutes.

Prepare a short presentation introducing yourself and explaining why you are there, summarizing the problems you have identified and describing your proposed solutions. It is important to be concise and to the point. Prioritize the most important issues and refer them to your brief for more complete explanations.

After your presentation, you will be asked questions by members of the committee. Use this opportunity to complement your presentation with important points you did not get to and to reaffirm your core message. You can testify in English or in French, and simultaneous translation is provided.



Once you develop relationships with members and once you become known as a person or organization who will often testify, you will receive more invitations. However, it is always useful to be proactive and signal interest rather than wait to be invited.

Committee hearings are public and streamed online. Watching previous hearings will give you a good sense of the kind of questions you might be asked, as some members ask the same questions of several witnesses. You will also get a sense of the attitude of the members. In some cases, members will ask rough questions and try to trap you. In other cases, the attitude of the members will be more open and positive (the House of Commons committee can be rougher than the Senate committees, as the Senate has a less partisan atmosphere).

► **Note that committee meetings rarely start on time. Do not be worried if you experience delays, and make sure to be available up to 30 minutes after your scheduled end time.**

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If you are in touch with members of the committee, especially in the House of Commons, you can send them suggested questions. It makes the members' (and their staff's) job easier, and it allows you to use your time more efficiently and get to all your important points.





### 3) Meeting with members of the committee

During the committee study stage, it is useful to meet with the Senate sponsor, Minister or Parliamentary secretary on the file as well as with other members of the committee, from the government or the opposition. You can go over your brief with them or explain the problems and solutions you have identified, and ask them if they will introduce or support the amendments that you recommend.

You might develop a stronger working relationship with some of the members who support your proposals and can keep in touch with the MPs or senators in question (or their staff) as the bill progresses through clause-by-clause study. It can be useful to follow the debates at committee by watching the meetings online, on the bill's page via the committee's website ([House of Commons](#) or [Senate](#)), to understand the members' concerns, questions and positions.

The committee's website also lists all members of the committee. Note that occasionally, there can be a change of membership or a temporary replacement during the study of the bill. Keep an eye out for those changes to include new members in your advocacy.

**Be persistent:** MPs and senators sometimes receive the answer “this is not possible” when raising potential changes with legislative drafters. When you receive that response to your demands, it is often useful to push back, either by insisting on the importance of the change or by using your legal background to argue that the proposed amendment is sound. Insisting rather than giving up on your demands may lead the MP or senator to also insist that the legislative drafter reconsider an issue or propose a new solution. In general, in legislative drafting, very few things are truly “impossible”.



## Monitoring progress

Keep an eye on the [Parliament's website](#) to monitor the progress of the bill you are interested in. A good strategy is to set up a website monitor to be notified of any changes on the bill's webpage. Sometimes bills move quickly through the legislative stages, and other times progress is slow. You can read the committee's report or compare different versions of the bill (all of which can be found on the bill's webpage) to see whether amendments have been adopted.

<b>C-261</b> 44th Parliament, 1st session An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act and to make related amendments to another Act (hate propaganda, hate crimes and hate speech)  <b>Current status</b> Outside the Order of Precedence <b>Last major stage completed</b> First reading in the House of Commons 	<b>C-262</b> 44th Parliament, 1st session An Act respecting the corporate responsibility to prevent, address and remedy adverse impacts on human rights occurring in relation to business activities conducted abroad <b>Short title</b> Corporate Responsibility to Protect Human Rights Act  <b>Current status</b> Outside the Order of Precedence <b>Last major stage completed</b> First reading in the House of Commons 	<b>C-263</b> 44th Parliament, 1st session An Act to establish the Office of the Commissioner for Responsible Business Conduct Abroad and to make consequential amendments to other Acts <b>Short title</b> Responsible Business Conduct Abroad Act  <b>Current status</b> Outside the Order of Precedence <b>Last major stage completed</b> First reading in the House of Commons 	<b>C-264</b> 44th Parliament, 1st session An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (pension plans and group insurance plans)  <b>Current status</b> Outside the Order of Precedence <b>Last major stage completed</b> First reading in the House of Commons 
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If you are satisfied with the state of the bill, you may consider writing an op-ed (a short opinion piece) for a newspaper or taking another public action to urge the second Chamber to quickly adopt the bill. If you feel more work needs to be done, you can continue lobbying for change once the second Chamber studies the bill, keeping in mind that changes to the bill by the second Chamber may delay its adoption.

Throughout the process, it is important to give credit where credit is due, and express appreciation towards MPs or parties that have supported you. For example, you might highlight in a newsletter or in a social media post the work that one MP is doing to introduce amendments that you proposed. At the same time, it is important not to alienate other members or parties. Sometimes, calling out a member or party may be necessary, but consider that you might need their support at another time.

## 2.4 Lobbying and the Lobbying Act

The word lobbying has a somewhat negative connotation. When we hear “lobbying”, we can think of the boys’ club engaging in more or less ethical conversations in the golf course. However, lobbying is a legitimate way for voters and other members of the public to communicate their needs and aspirations to public officials. It can help feminist law reformers advance their goals by developing working relations with decision makers like those mentioned in section 2.1 above. You do not need to be a professional lobbyist, and you do not need to hire one either! With planning and preparation, anyone can do it effectively.

Lobbying is a specific type of structured communication with elected and non-elected public officials. It is structured in the sense that it is regulated by law, but also in the sense that the communication is planned around a core message and a goal. We will look at these two aspects separately.

Note that many communications with federal officials are not considered lobbying. For instance, citizens speaking on their own behalf, requests for information or clarification, and formal consultations are all communications with federal officials that do not constitute lobbying.

### The Lobbying Act

At the federal level, lobbying activities are regulated by the Lobbying Act, RSC 1985, c 44 (4th Supp). Its goal is to ensure that lobbying is conducted in a manner compatible with the public good, rather than secretly and without accountability. It is important that we know who is seeking to persuade our public officials and on what matters. To this effect, the Act created a [Registry of Lobbyists](#) to track all lobbying activities. The Registry is publicly accessible and fully searchable.

The Lobbying Act also established an officer of Parliament—the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada—to carry independent oversight and ensure compliance with the Act. The Commissioner’s office has a public education mandate as well, and you can [request an information session](#) if you have questions or concerns regarding lobbying at the federal level.

Who should register as a lobbyist? The act defines lobbying as any paid communication with designated officials about federal policies or programs (including proposing or amending legislation and regulations), federal grants or other financial contributions and benefits, and federal contracts. Hence, individuals who lobby on a volunteer basis are not required to register.

There are two types of paid lobbyists. The first are professional lobbyists or consultants who work on behalf of a client. They should always register and report all their lobbying activities. The second are in-house lobbyists. These are employees whose responsibilities include communicating with federal officials. Whether an organization must register such employees as in-house lobbyists depends on [the 20% rule](#): If lobbying activities constitute 20% or more of the working hours of a typical employee in one month, the most senior officer must register the organization or corporation. This calculation includes all the hours worked by any employee in tasks related to the lobbying effort (research, planning, travel, writing, etc.). As such, if two employees spend 10% of their time each on lobbying, the organization must be registered.

Although different from public advocacy and consultations, lobbying may occasionally overlap with those activities. For instance, a public advocacy campaign that encourages members of the public to contact federal officers to pressure them to adopt a particular opinion may need to be registered, as this is considered an indirect technique of lobbying (i.e. grassroots appeals). Similarly, a consultation that is conducted behind closed doors and without public records may need to be registered even if it was initiated by the government.

Whether registered or not, though, all lobbyists should behave in accordance with the [Lobbyist Code of Conduct](#). If you decide to lobby, make sure to review this document beforehand, as it establishes rules and expectations regarding, for example, cooling off periods, gifts, and hospitality.

## Communicating with a goal

Lobbying is not chit-chat. Rather, it is a structured form of communication to persuade public officials to do (or not do) something. It should have a clear goal. For feminist law reformers, this would generally be persuading policymakers to implement specific legislative changes that promote gender equality and address discrimination. Lobbying can be used to make federal officials aware of issues that may not be visible to them, to present research and analysis, to provide an alternative to the narratives of opposite groups or organizations, to showcase the lived experience of individuals, or to remind politicians of their promises.

Meetings with federal officials may be hard to secure and are often quite short (30 minutes), especially if you want to meet with ministers or deputy ministers. Planning, preparation, and message clarity will maximize the chances of accomplishing your goal during those meetings. Here are some tips to help you organize your lobbying efforts.



## **Before Meeting Federal Officials:**

- Define a clear goal for the meeting or campaign. This will equip you to succinctly answer the question “What would you want me to do?”. It will also help you visualize what success will look like.
- Define your campaign. Lobbying may be part of a larger campaign that also encompasses public advocacy and grassroots mobilization. Such activities may be required for federal officials to be willing to listen to you in the first place. If that is the case, make sure that the lobbying plan is well integrated in the larger campaign plan. For instance, should lobbying activities be promoted on social media as part of a larger public advocacy campaign? Should you organize a rally to make politicians more likely to meet with you? These are the type of questions that can emerge when plugging lobbying activities into a larger campaign.
- Plan how to effectively use your three campaign resources: money, time, and people. This will require establishing priorities and making decisions about who will be responsible for the success of the lobbying effort (i.e. the lobbying team), over what period of time, and with what budget. Make sure your resources are adequate to accomplish your goal.
- Identify supporters and detractors among federal officials. This will help you envision the kind of resistance you are likely to face in your efforts, as well as determine whom to lobby and how. The most effective way to parse out MPs (and Senators) is to examine their [voting record](#), for it shows how they have reacted in the past in many areas of legislation.
- Identify other supporters and detractors. Are there other organizations or groups working on your issue? If so, which are likely to support you and even work in coordination with you (allies), and which are likely to lobby in the opposite direction?
- Craft a convincing message. You can focus on aggregated data analysis, lived experiences, moral arguments, expected benefits of a policy or program, or any other aspect you believe most relevant for your message. Whatever the case, make sure:
  - that the message speaks to your target audience. Politicians who like to hear about the lived experiences of their constituents, for instance, may not be easily swayed by statistics.
  - that you anticipate and rebuke counterarguments. This is especially important when there are opponents lobbying against your recommendations and proposals. You do not need to be an expert, but you do need to be ready for common questions and objections.
  - that the message is easily accessible. It is advisable, for example, to prepare materials to be made available to federal officials before, during, or after the meeting (fact sheets, briefs, reports, etc.).

## Meeting Structure

You can prepare an agenda to propose and follow during your lobbying meeting. This will help you ensure you accomplish your goal for the meeting. Typically, you would want to have enough time to do each of the following:

- Introduce yourself and the organization or group you represent.
- Deliver your core message. Explain what you want to talk about and why, and clearly articulate your ask.
- Answer any questions from the decision maker. Listen carefully, identify areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Try to obtain a commitment to do (or not do) something. Even a small commitment allows you to revisit the conversation later on and to push your agenda forward.
- Thank the officials for their time.

Make sure to stay focused for the totality of your meeting. You have carefully prepared a message, and this is not the time to improvise solutions to other problems or speculate about other issues. Be wary of questions intended to throw you off. For instance, do not lose track with questions like, “what should we cut to pay for your proposal?” Or “where will the money come from?” If you have prepared a response, you can delve into it. But if not, circle back to your core message. Similarly, do not give up if an official says something like, “I agree with you but there is nothing I can do.” In your planning you have already identified what is reasonable to ask from each of the officers you are meeting. So, gently remind them of your ask and try to obtain a commitment.

## After Meeting Federal Officials

- Follow up as required. You can send a thank you note, provide additional information, or check on a commitment.
- Report your activities if required by the *Lobbying Act*.
- Debrief and evaluate. Assessing the effectiveness of lobbying with your team is an important activity that is often neglected. Make evaluation part of the plan from the beginning. It is an opportunity to learn and identify areas for improvement.
- Celebrate your victories. Underlining any accomplishments may boost the morale of your team.



## Tips for effective meetings

- Arrive early. Plan for security checks and other possible delays.
- Keep an eye on the clock during the meeting.
- Take notes (who is present, what was discussed, what was the response, any follow ups).
- Make sure all members in your team have an opportunity to speak, not just the lead spokesperson.
- Pay attention to language (including body language).
- Emphasize areas of agreement and shared interests.
- Be persistent but be patient and polite.

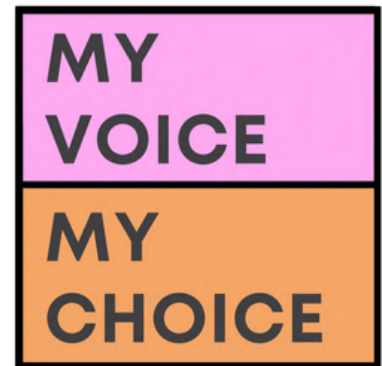




## 2.5 Case study: advocacy by My Voice, My Choice to reform publication bans

After experiencing sexual violence and the ensuing court process, Morrell Andrews wanted to publicly share her experience but discovered that a publication ban had been imposed on her identity under s. 486.4 of the *Criminal Code*. This ban prohibited anyone, including the victim, from publishing, broadcasting or transmitting identifying information about a victim-complainant of a sexual offence. Andrews had not been informed of the publication ban and needed to re-engage the courts with much difficulty to have it lifted. After sharing her experience on Twitter, several victims of sexual violence reached out to her with similar experiences with publication bans.

My Voice, My Choice (MVMC) formed through these online connections as an advocacy group of victim-complainants. They created a website, a Twitter account, and a petition to raise awareness. They engaged in email blast campaigns and partnered with lawyers and feminist advocacy groups. Their goal was to amend s. 486.4 of the Criminal Code, and they lobbied for this change from 2022, and then through the study of Bill S-12. This Bill became law in October 2023 and included many of MVMC's proposed changes. Their work transformed the law on publication bans to make it more trauma-informed for victim-complainants of sexual offences.



### Lobbying the Legislative Branch

In July of 2022, Andrews emailed 60 Members of Parliament, explaining the issue, her experience, and offering concrete recommendations. She obtained meetings with two Conservative MPs, and prepared extensively by drafting a briefing note, conducting research on the MPs' own interests, and tailoring arguments to resonate with their values. Through these meetings, Andrews was invited to testify before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. She was also advised to create a petition and find someone to sponsor a private Member's bill. Again, Andrews prepared extensively for the Committee appearance, recruiting other victim-complainants to feed into a briefing note about reforming s. 486.4. Before the meeting, she briefed at least one MP from every major political party. She also prepared statistics and stories to support any question that might be asked of her.

## Reaching the Executive Branch

In October 2022, after the decision of *R v Ndhlovu* was released, staffers from the office of the Minister of Justice replied to Andrews' earlier requests to meet. Parliament would have one year to draft new legislation for the sex offender registry and Andrews suggested that the government include amendments to publication bans in the same bill. After that meeting, Andrews kept in touch with the Minister's office, and provided insights on the issue. In April 2023, the Minister announced the tabling of Bill S-12, which included amendments to the publication bans regime.

The initial version of the bill had many flaws. Andrews, who is a public servant, remained confident that, with a bill on the table, MVMC could increase their efforts to advocate for amendments that better reflected the needs of victim-complainants.

## A Week of Action in Ottawa

In May 2023, a group of MVMC advocates travelled to Ottawa for a week of action, which closely followed the introduction of Bill S-12 in the Senate and overlapped with the tabling of the MVMC petition in Parliament. MVMC booked several meetings with Senators and Members of Parliament, sending a briefing note in advance of those meetings. MVMC planned the meetings carefully, using personal stories to illustrate the problem, and clarifying that they did not want progress on the bill to be impeded by partisanship.

In the same week, MVMC hosted an event on Parliament Hill, where politicians and their staff from every single political party attended and spoke publicly in support. MVMC advocates shared their stories on a panel and explained the difficulties of life under an unwanted publication ban. This gave attendees a deeper understanding of the harm caused by publication bans.



*My Voice, My Choice activists*

## Bill S-12 in the Senate

MVMC created a coalition with feminist legal organizations to provide input and suggest amendments to the proposed law through a brief. MVMC also drafted its own brief on the principles behind changes required in the legislation. In June 2023, Andrews and representatives from LEAF and NAWL appeared as witnesses before the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. In June 2023, the amended Bill S-12 passed through the Senate. While improved substantially in many priority areas, the new version of Bill S-12 did not sufficiently address all of MVMC's concerns.

## Bill S-12 in the House of Commons

After Parliament returned from summer break, MVMC provided an updated briefing note to MPs and explained the amendments that still needed to be made. Bill S-12 was introduced in the House of Commons on September 19, 2023. MVMC returned to Ottawa to meet with key MPs on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and Andrews appeared as a witness at the meeting on October 5 to further push for amendments.

Green Party MP Elizabeth May tabled MVMC's final amendments during the Committee's clause-by-clause deliberation. Most of the amendments were rejected due to the limited time left to pass S-12 before the Supreme Court's deadline of October 28, 2023. Andrews worked until the last moment, calling and emailing MPs, to try to secure amendments with victim-complainants in mind.

## Royal Assent

The final version of Bill S-12 received Royal Assent on October 26, 2023, and represented a significant step towards a more responsive and respectful legal system. The new law makes it nearly impossible to prosecute victim-complainants for violating a publication ban, grants more autonomy to survivors to decide whether they wish for their identify to be protected by a publication ban, and makes it easier for them to have the ban lifted after it is ordered. The final version of Bill S-12 did not meet all of MVMC's hopes. However, it represented a significant win and a huge step in the right direction.

MVMC's campaign was particularly effective, first in making publication bans an issue of national importance and convincing the government to act, and then in improving the bill. Feminist law reformers can replicate the strategies and draw inspiration from the courage and resilience of MVMC members.

# Part 3

## Tools and skills



### 3.1 How to organize a parliamentary petition

Individuals can create and submit a petition, which will be presented to the House of Commons by an MP. The House of Commons's website has a detailed [Guide to Creating and Submitting a Petition](#).

A petition is a short text (maximum 250 words) asking the Government, the House of Commons, a Minister or an MP to do a concrete action falling within federal jurisdiction. Examples of asks from past petitions include:

- That the Government of Canada commit to a federal policy for the [universal coverage of contraception](#);
- That the Government of Canada enact [legislative changes addressing the use of parental alienation accusations against women](#);
- That the Government of Canada [exempt compostable bags](#) from the ban of single-use plastic;
- That the House of Commons [recognize Hinduphobia](#) in the glossary of terms in the Human Rights Code.

The petition must be written in English or French and will be translated to the other official language.

To organize a petition, identify an MP who will authorize its publication. It is useful to reach out to potential MPs in advance of submitting the petition. Draft the petition ensuring that it is clear, concise, and respectful of the [House of Commons' rules](#), and identify 5 to 10 supporters who will be the first signatories of the petition. Once the petition is approved, you can disseminate it to your target audience by sending it to allies and partners and sharing it online. The petition must receive a minimum of 500 valid signatures within a set period (ranging from 30 to 120 days based on your preference).

After that time, the petition is closed for signatures and the MP who authorized the petition (or another MP) will present it in the House. The Government must respond to the petition within 45 days.

While Parliamentary petitions are a good way to get the Government's attention and prompt a response, they are unlikely to, by themselves, lead to law reform. Petitions usually do not receive media attention and may not receive many signatures. It is best to use this tool with a broader campaign strategy and involving a coalition of individuals and organizations.

## 3.2 How to do a public engagement campaign

While Parliamentary petitions are the official way to request action from the Government, it is also possible to use other tools to engage the public in your law reform efforts. Online tools that are made for collecting signatures for online petitions (for example, Change.org) or facilitating individuals writing to their MPs or other public officials (for example, New / Mode) are generally developed to maximize reach. They make it quicker and easier to participate (compared to a parliamentary petition) and images can be included to facilitate sharing on social media. Campaigns inviting individuals to write to their MP or other government officials are also great opportunities to collect email addresses from supporters – with their consent – and grow your mailing list. Supporters can then be kept informed of your campaign progress and can be invited to participate in further action, which is not possible with the Parliamentary e-petition.

Note that the most effective way to influence decision makers is often to have your supporters meet with their MP to discuss the issue. However, it takes very committed supporters to take such an action. A smaller ask, such as sending an email, is likely to be done by more supporters. You can build your campaign around the concept of the ladder of commitment: people who take part in a modest action are invited to undertake a more difficult action. For example, you could ask your supporters to sign a petition. Those who do so are redirected to a page asking them to sign a second petition. Then they receive an invitation to call their MP or share your campaign on social networks, and so on.





## Tips for an effective online petition

Your petition should have a clear and easy-to-understand ask of the government, a Minister or another individual. Start by crafting a description that clearly explains your cause, highlighting its significance and potential impact on society. A potential structure would be:

- Paragraph 1: what is the problem? Who is affected? Why is it serious?
- Paragraph 2: why should the reader care? What is going to happen if things don't change? Underscore the urgency of the issue by making an emotional appeal.
- Paragraph 3: what is the proposed solution? Encourage the reader to sign the petition.

You can also include a personal story or anecdote to engage the reader. Use straightforward language that is accessible to a broad audience, avoiding jargon, acronyms or complex terminology. You can also provide credible sources or expert endorsements to enhance the petition's legitimacy, such as a recommendation or report by a UN body or a Parliamentary committee.

The title is the most read part of your petition. Use strong and clear action words ("Stop doing X", "Save Y", "Ban Z"). Be specific in identifying the context (for example, is the petition specific to a municipality?). You can use a longer, two-part title to include more information (for example: "Abused women can't wait: fund shelters in the North"). Make sure your webpage includes at least one image for shares on social media.

While it can be tempting to include hyperlinks to resources in the description of your petition or email-writing campaign, you should be careful not to drive readers away from your page and call to action. It is better to include supplementary resources or a link to your website on the "Thank you" page that appears after the reader has participated in your campaign.

## Tips for an effective email-writing campaign

Platforms such as New / Mode enable you to make it easy for your supporters to write emails, make calls or post messages on social media regarding a specific issue. For emails, you can prepare a message and decide on your list of recipients, and all the supporter has to do is enter their location (to identify their MP), their name, and their email address. The email is then sent on their behalf.

Both in the campaign's description and in the message to the politician, make sure to

- avoid jargon;
- use plain language;
- clearly explain the problem and the solution;
- create a sense of urgency.

It is much easier for people to send an email than make a call or post a public message. Campaigns that facilitate email blasts are likely to be more effective, even though a phone call from a constituent carries a lot more weight for the MP who receives it.

It can be useful to prepare several versions of the email and its subject so that politicians receive messages that are varied and do not look like spam.

Include a clear ask in any communication to politicians, such as:

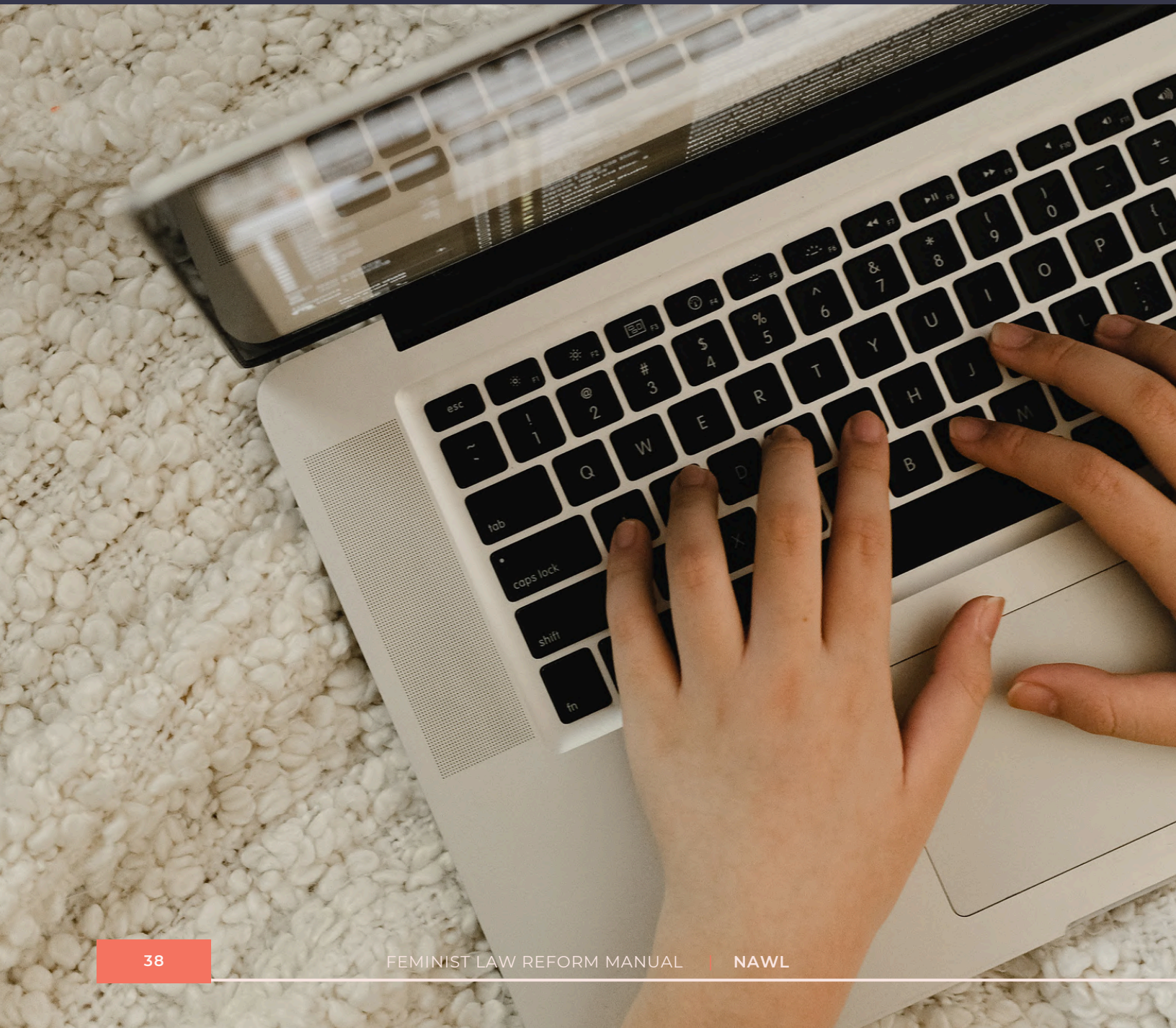
- "Please reply explaining your position on this issue";
- "Please ask your colleagues to pass the bill as amended";
- "Please support NAWL's proposed amendments";
- "Please let me know when you would be available for a meeting to discuss this issue".

You can allow supporters to write their own message or edit yours rather than sending a pre-determined email. However, consider that in such cases you may get adversaries sending messages to sabotage your campaign. Make sure you can approve or reject messages if you give people the ability to edit them.

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### 3.3 How to write an op-ed

**Op-eds are short opinion pieces published in newspapers and written by members of the public. They are a great way to express your opinion on a particular issue and position yourself as an expert.**





Op-eds are not reserved for the world-class expert; rather, they are meant for people with an opinion on something current and relevant. Although op-eds can be simple to write with a bit of practice, they require a specific writing style that must be learned.

If successful, op-eds can often catch the attention of lawmakers, making them an underrated form of law reform advocacy. Op-eds can lead to media interviews or being called to participate in government consultations or testify before a committee.

Before writing an op-ed, you should identify the newspaper you want to submit it to, so you can make sure you respect the word limit and adapt your style and content to the needs of that newspaper's readers.

Quick tip: If you are interested in getting the attention of a specific politician through your op-ed, it is essential that you name them so that the op-ed appears in their press review or Google alerts.



# Six tips for writing a successful op-ed

## 1 Identify a hook

To write a successful op-ed and increase your chances of being published, you need to relate your topic to current news to convince the editor to publish it now. You do not need to necessarily choose your op-ed based on current news, but you will have to highlight some sort of relation between the two. Here are a few examples of hooks to make your topic relevant:

- “Today is the anniversary of X event” / “Today is the international day for Y” (Make sure you submit the op-ed at least a few days before)
- “Parliament is currently considering Bill C-21, regarding gun control”
- “Since the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women has been recognized as rising to epidemic proportions”
- “Canadians are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis which has made the housing shortage more pressing than ever”

## 2 Make your title shareable

Your title should be clear and read as something people will want to share; a title that is too mysterious is not effective in that regard. Consider stating a clear opinion in the title – you will likely get readers sharing the title as a way of agreeing with the statement, regardless of whether they have read the article. Although a title with a question piques readers’ interest, it may be less shareable because readers have to read through the entire piece to know if they agree with your message.

## 3 Consider writing your introduction last

Besides the title, the introduction is the section of an op-ed that is the most read. The introduction is often the most challenging part to write and a part of the op-ed that you will likely need to rewrite several times. The first sentence of the op-ed should motivate readers to continue reading. Some examples include a question, a provocative statement, a pop culture reference, a challenge to conventional wisdom, or a surprising fact – anything that can pique the reader’s curiosity.

The introduction may also contain your key message, which is a simple thesis that can fit into one sentence. While you can address counterarguments, make sure your opinion is clear throughout the op-ed. Read examples of op-eds from the newspaper you want to be published in.



## **4** Polish your style

It is important to keep your op-ed reader-friendly and not use any jargon or acronyms. Consider that many people will read your text on their cellphone, so short paragraphs are essential.

Cut out repetition or unnecessary information. Keep in mind that you are not trying to prove an argument like in a research paper; you are simply making an argument about a specific issue. Ultimately, if it looks like an op-ed and reads like an op-ed, it will get published as an op-ed.

## **5** Edit, edit, edit

Once you have completed your op-ed, you should spend some time editing. Return to your introduction and rewrite it to align with the arguments you have made in the op-ed. Make sure that your title still matches the contents of the op-ed.

A second pair of eyes can catch mistakes you may have missed, so before sending your op-ed to the newspaper, have a friend read and edit it. If time allows, put the draft aside, return to it the following day, and read it aloud. Make sure to eliminate repetitions and long sentences.

## **6** Send it to a newspaper

After editing, you should email relevant newspapers or magazines with a short pitch. The pitch should include the subject of your op-ed, your main thesis, your hook, and your affiliation or authority on the topic. In the body of the email, include the title and number of words, and paste the entire op-ed instead of sending it as an attachment (unless the newspaper provides different instructions).

It is not acceptable to submit your piece to more than one newspaper, but newspapers do not usually reply when they reject a piece. For that reason, you can provide a deadline in your email, and if you have not heard back from the newspaper by the deadline, send a follow-up email informing them that you are retracting the submission and sending it to another newspaper. It usually takes a few days for a newspaper to accept a piece.

If the op-ed is accepted, save the contact information of the person who follows up with you so you can send your next op-ed directly to them. The newspaper may make edits to your piece, such as changing the title or shortening the content. They will not ask you to approve these changes.

Finally, it is important not to get discouraged if your op-ed does not get picked up immediately – it may just be bad timing. Once you get the hang of it, you can use this tool with regularity as a part of your law reform advocacy toolkit.

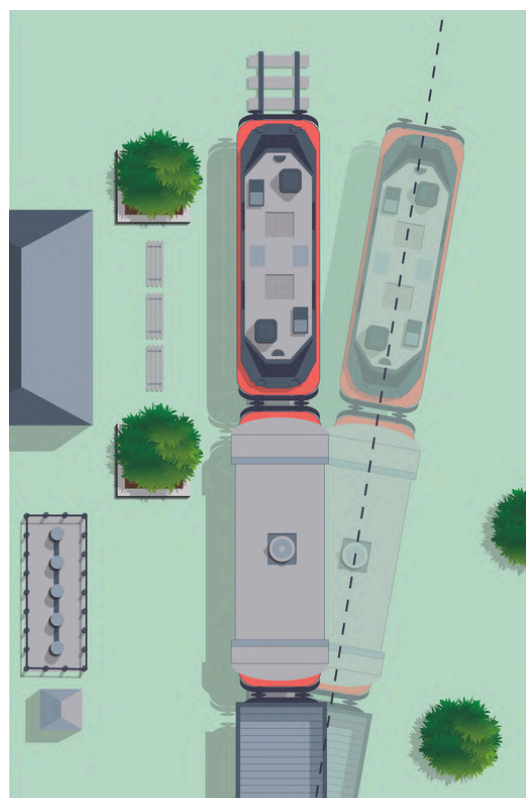
### Examples of op-eds:

- Kelly Bowden and Tiffany Butler, [‘Turning a medical procedure into a political one’: Why a law protecting abortion in Canada would do the opposite](#), Toronto Star, 2 January 2023
- Suzanne Zaccour and Aja Mason, [Gun control is a women’s issue](#), The Hill Times, 1 February 2024 (for subscribers only)
- Sabaa Khan, [Why Canada needs a law to combat environmental racism](#), Canada’s National Observer, 10 March 2021.

## 3.4 How to write a brief

The aim of a brief is to highlight one or more problems in a bill, but also and especially to propose concrete solutions in the form of amendments (i.e., modifications) to the bill. The brief is not the best opportunity to propose broad solutions that should be adopted as public policy beyond the bill. Broader issues may be mentioned, but the core of the brief should target concrete, specific solutions that can be achieved within the framework of the bill under consideration.

Since amendments must be within the scope of the bill, the brief’s objective is generally to get some low-hanging fruit, or to improve on a change already proposed, rather than to change the course of government projects. A metaphor about feminist law reform is that it’s about taking advantage of the train that’s already in motion to pick up concrete, accessible changes.



It is very difficult to stop a train or get it moving. But if the train is already in motion and you can change its direction by even just 5 degrees, the difference in destination eventually will be huge.

Bills can present unforeseen opportunities. It is important to pay attention to their details and learn about the law being amended so as not to miss opportunities for feminist law reform. Asking a lawyer or a legal organization – such as NAWL – to help you is a good strategy, since legal language and bills can be difficult for non-lawyers to understand.

Members of Parliament and their political staff are very busy, studying several issues simultaneously. Therefore, a good brief that makes their job easier by clearly explaining the issues concisely and proposing readily available solutions will be much appreciated, especially by opposition parties looking to propose amendments to a government bill. When approaching the governing party or the party that introduced the bill, you can present the bill as a good project that has the potential to make a difference for women and society, but that also needs some improvements to be able to fulfill its own objectives. A collaborative narrative, which proposes working together to accomplish common goals, can be very effective.

If the changes or amendments you propose are good and precise, they may in turn be proposed by one or more parties and discussed by the committee studying the bill, and even adopted by the committee. You will then have the satisfaction of having caused concrete changes to Canadian law!

Keep in mind that a brief is a practical tool, not an academic paper. You can include sources and references to enhance your credibility, but don't make it a complex, hard-to-digest document. Prioritize a clear, concise exposition of the problem and the solution sought.



## Brief content, form, and structure

The [House of Commons](#)' and [Senate](#)' websites list the formatting requirements for briefs they receive. There is a 10-page limit in the House of Commons, and a recommendation to keep the brief between 5 and 10 pages in the Senate. A longer brief will not necessarily be rejected, and exceeding the maximum length may be necessary if you have a lot of changes to propose; however, generally speaking, conciseness is a virtue.

Although problems should be clearly stated, if the problem is known and uncontroversial, it may be useful to focus more on the proposed solutions. You can also refer to other filed briefs in your own brief stating your support of them in whole or in part.

Be aware that briefs are made public; for sensitive subjects, you may ask the committee clerk to distribute to members a version containing your contact information, but to publish online only a version without this private information. Be aware that your brief will also be translated; for this reason, it is useful to send it several days before your appearance, if you are also testifying before the committee.

Here is a possible structure for a brief:

- Presentation page: organization, date, bill, list of endorsers or signatories if applicable;
- Brief presentation of the organization or author(s);
- Table of contents;
- Summary or general overview indicating whether you support or oppose the bill, and describing the problem and main solutions addressed in the brief;
- Explanation of the problem(s), with the structure: problem, solution, proposed amendment. If the bill is complex, it may be helpful to explain clearly what the bill currently states, in relation to what you are proposing. It's not necessary to include a concrete amendment proposal, but if you have the legal knowledge to do so, it's very effective.
- Conclusion and/or reminder of requested amendments or changes.

If your recommendations are numerous, list them at the beginning and/or at the end of your brief, so members of the committee don't have to search for them throughout your brief.

# Ideas for change

Looking for inspiration on how to propose changes to a bill? Here are prompts to generate ideas.

Does the bill contain:

- a list of factors where a factor is missing?
- a mandatory rule that should be swapped for discretion (a “must” that should be a “may”), or discretion that should be replaced by a mandatory rule (a “may” that should be a “must”)?
- something vague that should be made clearer?
- a complex process that could be simplified?
- exceptions that should be removed, or rules that should include exceptions?
- a good idea in theory, but that would be impractical in practice or have adverse results?

Is the bill missing something?

- Are there terms that should be defined?
- Should a preamble be used to highlight the gendered nature of this issue?
- Are there sufficient measures to ensure monitoring, compliance, accountability, and enforcement?
- An obligation that should have a specific time frame?
- Should someone be responsible for informing the public / legal actors / users / victims of something?





## Tips for identifying problems and proposing concrete solutions

- ① If possible, read the bill carefully in both French and English. It is often necessary to read the bill several times to fully understand it.
- ② If possible, form an alliance between a subject-matter expert and a legal expert to develop proposals for amendments.
- ③ Pay attention to the definitions of terms used in the bill. These definitions may be in the legislation being amended; for example, if the bill amends the Criminal Code, definitions found there may be relevant.
- ④ Pay attention to how the bill is written; you can use the same language to propose your amendments.
- ⑤ Always clearly state which section you are referring to, for example: “section 5 of the bill, which amends section 72 of the Act”.
- ⑥ Use clear language and short sentences; avoid ambiguity.
- ⑦ Use variations in format (bold, underlined, colour) to draw attention to your proposed changes. Make sure that black and white printing won’t make your content hard to understand (i.e. do not rely only on colour).
- ⑧ Always make sure your request is clear, concrete, and precise.
- ⑨ Anticipate counter-arguments.
- ⑩ In some cases, it may be useful to propose two solutions, specifying the differences and identifying your preference.

In general, make sure that saying “yes” is easy by making your request clear and making the politician’s work as easy as possible.

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## Tips for having an impact

Once you’ve written your brief, here are some strategies to help you have the impact you want:



Have your brief endorsed by credible organizations in the field.



Email your brief to each committee member and request a meeting to explain your demands or recommendations. At these meetings, ask the member to submit amendments along the lines of your proposals. Make sure you understand their concerns or questions, and follow up with additional information if necessary.

- Let the committee clerk and members know of your interest in being invited to testify.
- Ask to meet the minister or, more realistically, their parliamentary secretary or political staff.
- Whenever possible, work with all or as many parties as possible; ideally, you should convince the party in power, especially if it has a majority of seats.
- Publish an op-ed and/or talk to the media to draw public attention to the issues you have raised.
- Follow the progress of the bill by watching committee meetings and communicating regularly with allied MPs.

Examples of briefs:

- [NAWL's brief on Bill C-21](#), regarding gun control
- [My Voice, My Choice's brief on Bill S-12](#), regarding publication bans and victims' rights
- [NAWL's brief on Bill C-78](#), regarding family law

## Additional resources on feminist law reform

- NAWL's Feminist Law Reform 101 course:  
<https://course.nawl.ca/>
- Luke's Place "Feminist Law Reform for Gender-based Violence Organizations" training:  
<https://www.lukesplacetraining.ca/>



## Notes

[illegible]

## Notes

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# THANK YOU



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Celebrating the Legacy  
Célébrer l'héritage

Defining the Future  
Définir l'avenir