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WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION SUPPORTS WOMAN SHOT BY VPD IN WOMEN'S HOSPITAL; FEMINIST GROUPS DENOUNCE VIOLENCE

Monday October 3, 2022 - (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C) – Feminist organizations are strongly denouncing the Vancouver Police Department (VPD)'s arrest and use of a beanbag shotgun on a woman at B.C Women's Hospital. Battered Women's Support Services, Feminists Deliver, Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, Options for Sexual Health, Women Transforming Cities, Prince George Sexual Assault Centre, Hogan's Alley Society and Union of BC Indian Chiefs condemn the many, overlapping failed systems that resulted in violence against this vulnerable mother.

Battered Women's Support Services is now connected to the woman and is providing her long-term support in seeking safety, accountability, and justice. Based on reports from the woman, along with reports from media and hospital staff, the woman was denied access to her newborn baby at B.C Women's Hospital, and then shot by VPD officers with a beanbag shotgun on the morning of September 22, 2022. She was arrested, charged, and sustained physical injuries.

Says Angela Marie MacDougall, Executive Director of **Battered Women's Support Services**: "This is inexcusable violence on a mother accessing a women's hospital. Racialized women experience systemic barriers in accessing maternal healthcare, are routinely stereotyped and stigmatized, and are criminalized by the child welfare and policing system. If her baby was being taken from her, then *she* was the one in a hostage situation. She should have been supported and treated with care; instead, she was arrested and thrown into jail. This is unacceptable."

The Families in Recovery (FIR) Program at BC Women's Hospital is the first in Canada to care for women who use substances and their newborns exposed to substances. Their team was created to help new mothers and their babies stabilize safely by providing care and support throughout pregnancy and afterward, including support to transition back to community after

giving birth. The fourth trimester is the 12-week period immediately after birth and is a delicate time of great physical and emotional change for newborn babies and new mothers.

According to Rhiannon Bennett of the BC-wide provincial **Feminists Deliver** coalition, “This horrific incident raises so many questions. Why was she refused access to her own baby? What kind of proactive supports was she offered before this transpired? Why was the situation not appropriately de-escalated by all the trained professionals involved? So many people and institutions failed her. It’s incredibly upsetting.” On September 23, Feminists Deliver hosted a “Policing of Gender-Based Violence Symposium,” where organizations around the province discussed holding public institutions accountable in state responses to gender-based violence.

Says Djaka Blais, Executive Director of **Hogan’s Alley Society**, “For Black and Indigenous women who already endure the highest rates of gendered racial discrimination — at the hands of healthcare providers, child welfare agencies, and law enforcement — this is yet another reminder of how deeply unsafe and racist so many public institutions are and can be. Our voices must be at these decision-making and policy tables to overcome systemic barriers and marginalization.”

According to Alice Kendall, Executive Director of the **Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre**, “All around us there are clear indications of a crumbling social safety net: rising poverty and precarity, increasing gender-based violence, and more and more people in distress. And our responses to people in pain and anguish is outright police violence. Police are not health care providers, and criminalization is a never-ending cycle of harm. Under no circumstances can anyone condone police using a beanbag shotgun in a maternity ward.”

“It is deplorable that the woman in this situation is being vilified. There is a long history of policing and reproductive justice, especially for Black, Indigenous, and immigrant women,” states Michelle Fortin, Executive Director at **Options for Sexual Health**. “No birthing person should have to access healthcare in an environment of fear, surveillance, and intimidation.”

“Our hearts break for the many young women, mothers, and families whose pain is a symptom of unaddressed, long-term problems that only holistic and systemic changes can address,” adds Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the **Union of BC Indian Chiefs**. “Trauma is very present for vulnerable, racialized mothers who are marginalized by our society. We must keep families together. We must address the ongoing systemic racism, sexism, exclusion, and oppression within all our public institutions. We demand better from all healthcare providers, child welfare agencies, police, and justice systems. This new mother should not have been shot and hospitalized by the VPD and we demand accountability.”

Echoes Mahtab Laghaei, Campaign Lead at **Women Transforming Cities**, “Our public institutions must repair the conditions that allowed for a vulnerable mother to be shot, jailed, and denied access to her own child just weeks after birth.”

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