

Why is Province stonewalling on Sexual Harassment Week?

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On June 2, 1996, 56-year-old training administrator Theresa Vince was shot to death in Chatham Sears Canada office by her supervisor. He then killed himself.

She had been enduring sexual harassment from him for years and was planning to retire a couple of weeks later.

Why is it that 10 years later, after an inquest into the murder-suicide, a Liberal MPP's one-line Bill to declare the first week of June Sexual Harassment Awareness Week -- a Bill supported by the Vince family and women's rape crisis centres and labour unions -- has been buried in the agenda of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for almost a year without action?

Liberal MPP Pat Hoy sponsored the private member's Bill last year.

The one line text of the Bill is: "The first week in June in each year is proclaimed as Sexual Harassment Awareness Week."

Why isn't the Ontario government declaring this awareness week? Surely, a one-line piece of legislation doesn't require further study by a government Standing Committee.

Women, who experience different forms of harassment at work, experience physical and emotional harm as well as job loss, loss of references for future work and disrupted work experience. It has serious impacts on all parts of their lives and livelihood. And sexual harassment affects almost all women at some point in their lives.

Now there's a second private member's Bill on the books to make harassment of all kinds a part of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and put mechanisms in place to hold harassers accountable for their actions. This one was tabled by the NDP.

Violence against women is a non-partisan issue. Before MPPs take their summer break and begin campaigning for the October election, the McGuinty government has time to make both of these Bills a part of their legacy and to do something important to support women in workplaces all over Ontario.

A new election focussed women's coalition called Step it Up is calling on all Parties to make violence against women a priority in their upcoming campaigns. They're calling for an end to sexual harassment and other forms of workplace violence.

In memory of Theresa Vince and in support of all women who are forced to work in abusive workplaces, the Ontario Government needs to pass the two private member's Bills this June.

Let's not wait another 10 years for action. Let's not have another woman in Ontario murdered just for going to work.

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