

For Immediate Release:

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic joins as a public interest plaintiff in ‘unfounded’ lawsuit against the London Police Service

TORONTO, November 20, 2017 — The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic has joined as a plaintiff in the ‘unfounded’ lawsuit against the London Police Service (LPS) for its discriminatory investigation and dismissal of sexual assault cases between 2010 – 2017. We base our claim on our multi-decade experience of the ongoing and systemic discrimination sexual assault survivors face when seeking legal redress for sexual assault. We join the two individual claimants in demanding fundamental change as to how the London Police Service handles sexual assault crimes, based on our expertise as Canada’s only gender-based violence, multi-service clinic.

The Fresh as Amended Statement of Claim, which is available on the Clinic website, also adds a second individual Plaintiff, Jane Doe, who, like Ava Williams, was subjected to treatment steeped in rape-myths by the LPS. After reporting her rape, Jane Doe was asked by the investigating officer if she felt that she had to report the sexual assault to “save face”. The Officer further told Jane Doe that: the incident was “embarrassing,” she didn’t need to tell anyone about it, and that he would not want his daughter ruining her reputation by making a public report. The officer closed the file as “unfounded.”

“The addition of both Jane Doe and the Clinic together with Ava will ensure that the Court will have before it all the necessary parties to provide both personal and systemic remedies needed to redress the systemic discrimination these and other women have endured,” says lawyer, Joseph Arvay.

On a national level, one in three women experiences sexual violence. Following a public investigation, the London Police Service was found to have dismissed one-third of all sexual assault allegations in 2014 and an ‘unfounded’ rate of 33 percent.

“For three decades the Schlifer Clinic has worked to improve police practices and to enable access without fear for survivors in responding to sexual assault. Police training and temporary policy commitments have not been enough to effect systemic change” says Clinic Executive Director Amanda Dale. “It is essential that the Court formally recognize that police practices based in gender discrimination are a violation of women’s *Charter* rights and that changes to procedure are made on this basis.”

The lawsuit advocates for the adoption of the “Philadelphia Model”, which would involve a court-ordered panel of independent experts in sexual assault to review London Police Service sexual assault cases closed as ‘unfounded’ or otherwise unsubstantiated.

“For women’s organizations with expertise in the area of sexual violence, the Philadelphia Model is an opportunity to collegially support the London Police Service’s commitment to providing a fulsome and trauma-informed response to survivors of sexual violence,” explains Joanna Birenbaum, co-counsel for the Clinic and individual Plaintiffs. “In serving as co-plaintiff, the Clinic hopes to support and strengthen the important work of local women’s organizations and ensure ongoing critical attention is paid to sexual violence crimes, long after the current publicity fades.”



About Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic is a specialized clinic for women experiencing violence, established in the memory of Barbra Schlifer – an idealistic young lawyer whose life was cut short by violence on the night of her call to the bar of Ontario on April 11, 1980. In her memory, the Clinic assists approximately 4,000 women a year to build lives free from violence through counselling, legal representation, and language interpretation. Since opening in 1985, the Clinic has assisted more than 60,000 women.

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