

Jones would support private member's bill from NDP leader

By Bill Rea

Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath believes it's time to protect survivors of domestic and sexual assault, and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones agrees.

Jones, earlier this week, indicated her support for a private member's bill Horwath introduced that would extend 10 days paid leave to people who experience domestic or sexual violence.

"I think she's on the right track," Jones said, pointing out the bill is aimed at protecting victims, as well as those they love.

The bill was introduced last Thursday.

"It's time to protect survivors," Horwath said. "By giving people 10 days of paid leave, as well as up to 15 weeks of unpaid leave, we're giving them one of the pieces they may need to get their lives back."

The bill would provide time off for survivors of violence to get to safety, speak to police, participate in court proceedings and get medical attention, including mental health care. She pointed out that for many, taking time to do those things could cost them a paycheque or even their job.

"Too often, survivors are left alone, without the options and without the protections they need to get out of violent relationships," Horwath observed. "That's just not right."

"No one in this province should have to pay a price for looking out for their own safety or the safety of their kids," she added. "By passing this bill, we can make sure that no woman has to choose between her job and her safety."

Jones pointed out the provisions of the bill will enable victims to be away from their work places without their abuser knowing, enabling them to "map out your escape route."

As well, the bill proposes that the government would cover the cost of extending paid leave to survivors, believing that ending intimate partner violence is the responsibility of everyone.

Jones agreed with that provision, pointing out it would take the burden off employers for the collective good.

"We have a collective responsibility to give survivors the support and protection they need," said NDP Women's Issues critic Peggy Sattler. "Guaranteeing they can miss work without missing a paycheque removes one of the reasons that some women feel trapped in abusive relationships. It means survivors can take time to find a safe place to live without losing the income they need to pay the rent."

"Women and survivors across this province cannot wait any longer for this government to find the courage to act," Horwath said. Despite her support, Jones doesn't think the bill is likely to pass.

She said the Liberal government put forth some similar legislation, to which the NDP proposed amendments, and they were voted down.