

## **Open Letter to Halifax Harbour Bridges**

The following open letter was drafted by Avalon Centre to bring attention to problems with the recent “Bridget” campaign of Halifax Harbour Bridges.

May 31, 2011

Steve Snider  
CEO and General Manager  
Halifax Harbour Bridges

Dear Mr. Snider:

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our concerns about the Halifax Harbour Bridges “Bridget” Campaign. Together, we represent many groups and organizations doing the day to day work to end violence against women in Nova Scotia.

In 2010, over 2500 women reported incidents of intimate partner violence and 574 women reported incidents of sexualized violence. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of people who report domestic violence to the police has increased by 43 percent. These numbers, however, represent a small number of the women who actually experience domestic violence. A 2009 self-reported survey on victimization found that only 15 per cent of people who experience domestic violence report. For incidents of sexualized violence the reporting rates are even more dismal; less than 1 in ten people report incidents of sexualized violence to the police.

We believe that violence against women can only end when people in all sectors of society take up the responsibility to challenge sexism, including the objectification of women in advertising and the media. You may not be aware that May is Sexual Assault Awareness Month in Nova Scotia; a month for governments, institutions, and communities to challenge sexualized violence wherever it is happening. This year, SAAM focused on taking action to end sexualized violence, through promoting healthy sexuality. The Halifax Regional Police took this opportunity to launch videos calling on Nova Scotia men to be more than bystanders in ending violence against women. This campaign encourages men to challenge sexist behaviour that degrades women and/or promotes violence against women.

It is unfortunate that Halifax Harbour Bridges has not taken up this challenge, launching a campaign that sexualizes and uses women as a means for the

commission's message. The purpose of the campaign is to improve bridge safety, but it completely ignores that women in the HRM also deserve to be safe from sexualized harassment and violence. The "Listen to Bridget" Twitter feed has resulted in responses that actively promote violence against women including Tweets that suggest that the worth of having a woman as the face of this campaign is that you can throw coins at her as you cross. This type of campaign promotes and encourages treating women not as respected persons in our society, but as objects to be disrespected. The thousands of women who have experienced violence should have the right to travel through the streets of the HRM without constantly being subjected to sexualized and objectified images of women. That is also a safety issue.

We are asking that Halifax Harbour Bridges immediately stop the current Bridget campaign, publicly apologize for harm the campaign may have caused, and consider the impact of future campaigns on women in the HRM.

Sincerely,

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre  
Tri-Country Women's Centre  
Colchester Sexual Assault Centre  
Stepping Stone  
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association  
Hollaback Halifax  
Halifax Sexual Health Centre