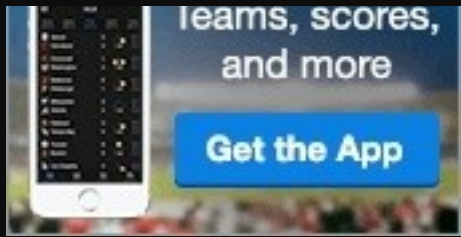




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55 Yard Line

# New comprehensive CFL policy on violence against women called "bold," "historic"



By Andrew Bucholtz  
15 hours ago  
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(L to R) Stephanie Cadieux, Minister for Children and Family Development, B...

The new policy on violence against women the CFL announced Thursday after almost a year of development is a huge step forward on a number of levels. Tracy Porteous, the chair of

the Ending Violence Association of Canada and the executive director of Ending Violence B.C., called it "bold" and "historic" on a media conference call, and in many ways, it is. The policy, which was developed in consultation with key groups working to end violence against women across Canada, is one of the first national ones of this scale, and it incorporates many remarkable and positive elements, including education of players and staff, training players to educate the wider community, a focus on helping the woman involved if an incident does occur,

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application to team officials and even fans, and a recognition that a criminal conviction won't always be obtained in these cases. Everything this policy covers appears to be covered pretty well. What isn't covered is pre-CFL actions, and [that's a matter for further discussion](#), but what is here seems strong, and it could have impacts well beyond the league. Here's the key part of what Porteous said in her opening statement on the call.

"History has been made with this announcement," she said. "Never before have we seen a national organization, much less a national organization led by men or a professional sports league, take such a bold step and say that violence against women is not okay. ... I have been working in the field of addressing violence against women for over 30 years and I have never been involved in anything as exciting or important as today. We are giving thanks to the CFL and to the commissioner himself for being as bold as you have been."

And here's what she said when I asked her why this policy was so groundbreaking.

"I believe this policy has the potential to lead the way for other businesses and corporations," she said. "Very few companies, corporations, even educational institutions have instituted specific policies to say violence isn't okay, all violence is condemned."

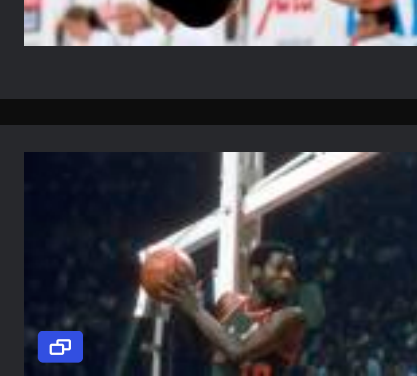
Porteous mentioned that the province of Ontario has developed some legislation along these lines for civil servants, but beyond that, the CFL's approach is almost unique.

"Beyond that, there are no, that we know of, national or provincial organizations that have established such a policy," she said. "This is quite historic."

She said the CFL's size and scope, and its significance to Canadians, also makes this an important development, and one other organizations may follow. Even if they don't, though, the CFL's size means this will still impact a lot of people.

"The CFL is a national organization that has more than 1,000 affiliates," she said. "This policy has the chance to make a difference in more than 1,000 families."

The CFL's new policy is much more comprehensive than the typical sports league one, and it includes a lot of great dimensions. It covers coaches and other staff as well as players, it even extends to fans at CFL games, and it's working to educate players and staffers not just so they avoid committing violence against women, but so they can be role models trying to influence the wider Canadian community (through initiatives like the "Be More Than A Bystander" partnership the Lions have had with the Ending Violence Association of B.C., which has been very successful).



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No love lost when Warriors

This is a policy that's going to go into effect quickly (for example, B.C.'s new players have a training session scheduled for tomorrow), and it's one that will be led by experienced local anti-violence groups in each community, working from a shared national playbook.

"We have already begun conversations with the CFL about the implementation plan," Porteous said. "We're going to collaborate and develop curriculum centrally and then have those local organizations work with the team."

Beyond just education and prevention, the policy also covers a wide variety of incidents, going beyond domestic violence to also address sexual violence, sexual assault and verbal abuse. If and when an incident does occur, this policy isn't solely focused on punitive action against the perpetrator, but makes the first priority working with local organizations to help the victim. That's vital, and amazing to see from a league. CFL commissioner Jeffrey Orridge said on the call that a key thing they learned working with anti-violence associations to develop this policy was that the focus should be on helping the victim before punishing the perpetrator or debating what an incident means for the league.

"In the way it really matters most, it's not about the CFL, it's about women who face or fear violence," he said. "The CFL condemns violence against women in all its forms. We all need to do our part."

There's clear buy-in from the teams into this policy and into working more closely with local anti-violence organizations to make it effective, too, as Lions' president Dennis Skulsky said on the call.

"As an organization, we encourage and applaud it," Skulsky said. "I think the true champions are all these groups."

Orridge said this policy will work both to prevent and educate, but also to step in when needed and send a strong message that violence against women won't be tolerated.

"For us, the change will start with education across the league and with raising awareness," he said. "When there is clear evidence of violence against women, this will allow us to impose sanctions against the perpetrators."

When it comes to those sanctions, this policy is smart. It involves both CFL and law enforcement investigations, it doesn't rely solely on law enforcement charges or convictions (which are often extremely difficult in these cases), and it makes it clear that severe sanctions can be imposed, but it has enough flexibility both in determining that punishment should be applied ("when it has been confirmed that an act of violence against women has occurred") and figuring out what that punishment



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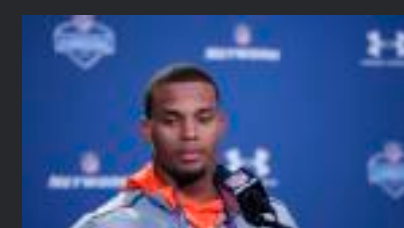
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should be ("sanctions will range from fines to suspensions, for single or multiple games, to a lifetime ban from the CFL") to cover just about anything that should come up. This is clever, and it means that the league hasn't written itself into a corner; it has lines along which to act, and those lines seem strong, but it hasn't specifically mandated particular standards of proof or particular punishments for a given offence, which should allow it to deal with anything that comes up in an appropriate manner.

Orridge said the league is committed to this effort for the long haul, and that they will be providing substantial resources to make it work.

"We're going to put the required amount of resources in to make this an effective program," he said. "We've already started the conversation. Leaguewide, it's going to be implemented in a very short amount of time."

Orridge said this policy as a whole provides a way for the CFL to be a leader, both in sports and beyond the sports world.

"We recognize the power of sports and the influence of those involved with sports," he said. "Sport has the power to change lives and the power to change societal norms. ...We wanted to send a clear signal to men and women everywhere that we don't condone violence against women."

Also see our piece on [what this policy doesn't cover](#).

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