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Canadian Association for Community Living

Volume 10 Issue 5 March 2012

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For Immediate Release

March 30, 2012

Disability Rights Organizations Launch Formal Complaint for Biased, Damaging Media Coverage

Toronto, ON – The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) joins other disability rights groups in calling on Global News to account for the exclusion of the voices of persons with disabilities and their families in recent programming and is launching a formal complaint in an attempt to address this issue.

On Friday March 16th, Global Television aired an episode of the program *16x9* accompanied by a live blog discussion featuring advocates who wish to change Canadian law in order to allow them to end the lives of their sons and daughters with disabilities. It featured a panel of convicted murderer, Robert Latimer; commentator Arthur Schafer, who has argued that Robert Latimer's sentence was 'unjust' and Annette Corriveau a mother from Ontario who wants the law changed to allow her to end the life of her two children who have disabilities.

Laurie Larson, CACL President, stated: "There was an extreme bias represented by the program that needs to be explained. We were alarmed by Global's uncritical promotion of these views and by the blatant disregard of the voices of the movement of people with disabilities and families who would tell "a different story." This programming provided a mere platform for these views—not a discussion."

CACL has been contacted by many in the disability community who were deeply disturbed by Global's portrayal of life with a disability as a tragic life without value. The program repeatedly suggested that parents are being unreasonably prevented by law from acting on a wish to end the life of their child. The program incorrectly stated that Canada's laws permit the removal of nutrition and hydration as a means for ending the life of a person with a disability. The uncritical presentation of such views is inflammatory and dangerous.

Canada's laws are in place to protect the equal rights to life, safety and security shared by all citizens. These laws are especially critical as we enter times where people with disabilities, along with other groups such as the elderly or people with additional health care needs, are facing numerous threats to their well-being. In such times, CACL stands firmly on our vision of inclusion and principles of equality, diversity and community and will defend the equality rights of people with intellectual and other disabilities. We will continue to challenge positions that border on hate but parade in a cloak of 'ethics' and demand that media be held

accountable for the broadcast of material that crosses the line from “controversial” to hurtful, damaging and inflammatory.

We are asking Canadians to join us in holding media to a high standard for public conversation of these difficult issues—not sensationalism and one-sided platforms that undermine both the moral and legal status of targeted groups, as was clearly the case here. CACL has registered a formal complaint with Global News and the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council and is asking other concerned Canadians to do the same.

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For more information contact Michael Bach, CACL Executive Vice President, 416-209-7942; mbach@cacl.ca.

CACL President - Laurie Larson Addresses Global Television

March 30, 2012

To: Global Television
Attn: Jennifer Tryon (jennifer.tryon@globalnational.com)
CC: Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (complaints@cbsc.ca)

The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) is profoundly and deeply offended by recent biased and inflammatory programming aired on Global Television which broadcast views about the lives of people with disabilities that are hurtful, damaging and dangerous.

On Friday March 16th, Global Television aired an episode of the program *16x9* accompanied by a live blog discussion featuring advocates who wish to change Canadian law in order to allow them to end the lives of their sons and daughters with disabilities. It featured a panel of convicted murderer, Robert Latimer; commentator Arthur Schafer, who has argued that Robert Latimer’s sentence was ‘unjust’ and Annette Corriveau a mother from Ontario who wants the law changed to allow her to end the life of her two children who have disabilities.

CACL was shocked by the extreme bias of the panel assembled for the televised program and accompanying live blog discussion. The one-sidedness of the panel provided a platform for these views—not a discussion. We are alarmed by the uncritical acceptance and promotion of these views and by the blatant disregard of the voices of the movement of people with disabilities and families who would tell “a different story.”

There are deeply concerning shifts taking place in society whereby a ‘perfect storm’ of threats are increasingly making it a dangerous time to be a person with a disability. Resource constraints, exploding demands on the health care system, the ‘perfect baby’ myth, proliferation of pre-natal screening technologies and routine termination of pregnancies involving Downs Syndrome and other disability traits are all contributing to a bigger picture conflict whereby certain groups are being singled out and targeted. Global’s programming uncritically provided a platform for perpetuating profoundly devaluing and damaging views without regard for this bigger picture or providing opportunity for people with disabilities and their families to provide a different perspective.

In this context, we are deeply disturbed by Global’s portrayal of life with a disability as a tragic life without value. We reject the repeated and dangerous suggestion by the Global Television program that parents are being unreasonably prevented by law from acting on a wish to end the life of their child. We reject the inflammatory suggestion made in introducing the program that “the law of nature would not see their survival—but here, the law of a nation keeps them alive.” Further, we correct the inaccurate statement that Canada’s laws permit the removal of nutrition and hydration—food and water—as a means for ending the life of a person with a disability.

Canada’s laws are in place to protect the equal rights to life, safety and security shared by all citizens. These laws are especially critical as we enter times where people with disabilities, along with other groups such as the elderly or people with additional health care needs, are being singled out and targeted. In such times, we stand firmly on our vision of inclusion and guiding principles of equality, diversity and community and will

defend the equality rights of people with intellectual and other disabilities. In order to do so, it is critical that we address outrageous instances where these notions are provided a platform and demand that media be held accountable for the broadcast of material that crosses the line from “controversial” to hurtful, damaging and inflammatory.

By this letter, we are registering our complaint regarding the views about people with disabilities broadcast on the program 16x9. We are also registering a formal complaint with the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council as we believe that this programming is in contradiction to a number of principles outlined in the *Code of Ethics* and *Equitable Portrayal Code*. We ask that Global take action to address and prevent such one sided portrayal of issues and we remain anxious to discuss how this might be achieved.

Sincerely,
Laurie Larson, President
Canadian Association for Community Living

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