

## **Legal group pulls out of B.C.'s Missing Women Inquiry**

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A non-profit group that provides legal representation to residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside has pulled out of the B.C.'s Missing Women Inquiry because it feels the process is unfair.

Pivot Legal Society lawyer Douglas King and campaign director Darcie Bennett announced Tuesday they would not participate in the commission run by former attorney general Wally Oppal.

The organization blamed the government's decision not to fund sex worker organizations, women's groups and aboriginal groups to participate in the Inquiry.

"I think the writing's been on the wall for awhile. We were hopeful when the inquiry began some of the initial problems would be overcome, but the ultimate feeling now is that it's not a fair process," said King.

Several groups, including the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of B.C. and WISH, a drop-in centre for sex workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, have all said they can't afford to take part in the inquiry without financial help from the government.

The government has said funding the groups would be too expensive.

Several other groups have also complained their concerns are not being taken seriously because their presentations have been relegated to less formal study commission sessions, instead of the formal hearings....

Critics have also pointed to the government's decision to provide full legal representation for police and other government agencies as evidence of bias.

"So we're left with a situation where every police officer who testifies will have a lawyer but everyone on the victim's side has to be on their own or rely on the one lawyer appointed for the victims' families," said King.

Instead of attending the inquiry, Pivot says it plans to launch its own new initiative to collect sworn statements from women to assess how much has changed for sex workers and other vulnerable women trying to report violence....