

Christie OKs meeting with shelter officials

By David Jackson
Provincial Reporter

Directors of transition houses from Sydney to Yarmouth gathered Monday at Province House to demand the Hamm government restore \$800,000 to their budgets.

About 25 women, some also representing women's centres, gave news releases and petitions to MLAs from all three parties and confronted Community Services Minister Peter Christie and Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc.

"You're instilling great fear in the women and children of this province," Mary DeWolfe, co-chairwoman of the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, told Mr. Christie outside the legislative chamber. "And I'm not talking just about workers. I'm talking about battered women who need our services."

Opposition critics have berated Mr. Christie over the matter since the provincial budget was tabled Thursday. It reduced funding for transition houses to \$3.8 million from \$4.6 million and contained a total cut of \$890,000 to transition houses, women's centres and programs for men who have been abusive.

The women demanded Mr. Christie put the money back in the budget and set up a meeting with them next Monday.

"You can't bleed us and ask us to come to the table with us bleeding," one woman told the minister.

Mr. Christie agreed to meet with transition house representatives sometime next week, whenever is convenient for them, but didn't agree to restore the money.

"We will have that meeting because we need to look at where we're going, how we're going to



Peter Parsons / Herald Photo

A group representing shelters for battered women across the province confronts Community Services Minister Peter Christie at Province House in Halifax on Monday.

approach this, and I think you'll have some valuable input into that," Mr. Christie told the group.

The women cried "shame" as Mr. Christie then entered the House. Earlier, one woman called him "Peter, Peter, the women's services eater."

Lucille Harper, director of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, said she's heard her facility will also see a funding cut, but she doesn't know how much yet.

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She explained transition houses deal specifically with women subjected to violence in intimate relationships and provide shelter and outreach services, like counselling, while women's centres offer a wide range of services for women, such as helping them find retraining programs and working with teens.

Ms. Harper said the budget cuts would mean different things to different organizations.

"Certainly, what it'll mean to women's centres is that we won't be able to maintain our staff so that women who are coming for services, the doors won't be

open," she said. "There won't be enough women there to look after their needs."

Liberal Dave Wilson, the party's community services critic, joined the women in condemning the cut.

"This is a reprehensible act by a minister who is as cold-hearted as you can possibly get," Mr. Wilson said in the legislature.

New Democratic critic Maureen MacDonald, who last week said the minister doesn't know his "ass from his elbow," said he should have talked to transition house staff before the budget.

"There's no point in cutting services first and then talking about it later," she said.

Last week, Mr. Christie was unclear about whether he had talked to transition house repre-

sentatives prior to the budget.

The critics accused Mr. Christie of misleading Nova Scotians. Mr. Christie said all he meant was that transition house staff were happy to be part of the "redesign" of services.

Mr. Christie also created confusion about bed closures. On Thursday, he said 39 of 148 beds at shelters provincewide could close. On Friday, he said the province needs 75 to 80 beds, based on vacancy rates.

Mr. Christie has said that other government initiatives, such as Justice Department measures to help women stay in their own homes and make it easier to get peace bonds, are part of the overall approach to helping women.

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