



## **Senate Reform an Opportunity to Prioritize Women's Rights to Equal Representation**

**June 22, 2011, Toronto** - In response to the federal government's Senate reform bill tabled in the House of Commons yesterday, Equal Voice called on the government to appoint women to the Senate until gender parity is achieved.

LEAF supports this call and urges the government to take concrete steps to address women's political underrepresentation.

"Women are entitled to effective representation and to play a meaningful role in our political system, not only as a matter of democratic legitimacy and good public policy, but as a matter of constitutionally guaranteed rights" explains Joanna Birenbaum, LEAF Legal Director. "The appointment of women to the Senate until parity is achieved respects and promotes women's rights to equality and effective representation as found in ss.3, 15 and 28 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*."

The democratic deficit caused by women's underrepresentation has been repeatedly recognized. The 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (the Lortie Commission) noted that this "serious underrepresentation" affects the "legitimacy of our democratic institutions". In 2004, the Law Commission of Canada confirmed the underrepresentation of women in the legislature as a "serious concern" and emphasized that Canada "must seek measures...so that women are equally represented in the House of Commons."

"Women's underrepresentation is persistent and pervasive" states Birenbaum, "Democracy and respect for our constitution are the bedrock of Canadian values. The government should therefore make addressing this democratic deficit a priority in any reform efforts, whether it be Senate reform, the proposed addition of 30 seats to the House of Commons, or changes to party financing."

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