

**Law Society of Ontario Award Ceremony, Laura Legge Award  
May 22, 2019**

I am deeply honoured to be receiving this award tonight. Many, many thanks to the people who put together my nomination package and to those who wrote the wonderful letters supporting my nomination.

I went to law school when I was in my mid-30s because I wanted to learn how to use this most powerful institution – the law -- as a tool for justice. Although I was a feminist and a long-time political activist, I did not have women in mind particularly when I embarked on this journey, but that changed very quickly, as I saw the many ways the law functioned to maintain the status quo – one in which I seemed to be largely invisible -- and to oppress, marginalize and discriminate against women. Once my eyes were opened to that reality, my trajectory changed radically.

My entire working life as a lawyer has been focused on the impact of the law on women's lives; primarily in the context of violence. I have been able to take what I learned from my years of practicing law and apply it to what I do now – work for systemic change.

This work has been intense, challenging, frustrating, interesting, humbling, infuriating, discouraging, moving and inspiring. I have not regretted a minute of it, and I intend to be doing it for some time yet to come.

My frustration and discouragement come from the failure of the law yet to respond appropriately to the violence to which so many women continue to be subjected.

Despite a *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that guarantees us equality before and under the law, a minimum of one in three of us has been or will be sexually assaulted; 25 – 30% of us have been or will be abused by our intimate partner. We still earn, on average, just 72 cents for every dollar earned by men. We are sexually harassed at work. And the list goes on.

When a woman who has been subjected to violence asks me: “But isn't the law supposed to help?” I want to be able to tell her that it will, but I can't if I want to speak truth to her.

My inspiration comes from the countless women in this country who are subjected to misogynist violence and abuse and have the courage to say “no more” and by the frontline workers who provide tireless support to them.

It is my hope that when these voices can be heard, we will be able to change the law from a weapon used against women into a tool that women can use to empower themselves.

In honouring me with this award, you are also honouring those women. Thank you very much.