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**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL  
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

92/93-0104  
DECISION CONCERNING CTV's "W5" AIRED ON JANUARY 24, 1993

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*June 11, 1993*

**FACTS OF THE CASE**

On January 24, 1993, the CTV Network aired an episode of W5, concerning teens abusing the welfare system.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) received a complaint, dated February 15, 1993, about the program. The complaint was referred to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) for consideration. A viewer, representing a shelter for abused women and their children, felt that the program "misrepresented" her agency to the viewing audience. She wrote that,

"... we were shocked and dismayed to find that the real agenda of W5 was not abused teens, but teens who were abusing the system and that our agency was portrayed as aiding and abetting these young women. For the record we are not in the business of sheltering teens who can't live at home because of parental rules ...

"... the implication of this program was that our agency encourages teenagers to leave home when they don't like their parents' rules, which is not true.... The fact is we don't determine welfare eligibility. If your interviewer had been honest with us, we could have spoken to our experience with teens who try to abuse the system. The reality that we must constantly face is that there are many teens who are abused by a family member. Your program has called into question the legitimacy and credibility of these teens needing care and attention ..."

The CBSC Secretariat sent the complaint to CTV for response. In its March 19, 1993 response, CTV quoted from a transcript of the program and added,

"... our intention was ... to address a serious problem which is diverting

money in the social assistance program from those who really need it ....

" ... [a counsellor at the shelter] ... stated in the interview that young people, who comprise perhaps 20 per cent of those who seek shelter at the ... [name of shelter] ... cite abuse as the most common reason for being there ...

" ... parents whom W5 interviews say that the effect of this policy is to spread through the schools a broad definition of abuse that runs all the way from serious criminal acts to remarks that could be construed as rude or insulting. This, coupled with the acceptance without question of claims of abuse by teenagers, is the crux of the problem which was the basis for the W5 report...."

" ... in a specific case featured on W5, the mother and father of ... [an adolescent who had stayed at the shelter] ... stated that ... [their daughter] ... had concocted stories of abuse in order to gain admission to ... [name of shelter] ... and, from there, admission onto the welfare rolls.

" W5 wanted to understand the process by which something like this could happen ..."

The viewer was unsatisfied with this response and wrote to the CBSC to have her complaint considered by the CBSC's Ontario Regional Council. On May 26, 1993, the regional council met to discuss the complaint.

## **CODE AT ISSUE**

The CBSC Secretariat indicated that the complaint could be considered against the Code of Ethics of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB). Clause 7 of the code states that:

"Recognizing in a democracy the necessity of presenting all sides of a public issue, it shall be the responsibility of member stations to treat fairly, all subjects of a controversial nature. Time shall be allotted with due regard to all the other elements of balanced program schedules, and to the degree of public interest in the questions presented. Recognizing that healthy controversy is essential to the maintenance of democratic institutions, the broadcast publisher will endeavour to encourage presentation of news and opinion on any controversy which contains an element of the public interest."

## **CBSC DECISION**

The regional council members reviewed those aspects of the complaint which related to the code, and CTY's response. They also viewed a tape of the program in question.

The members indicated that the broadcaster's treatment of the shelter and the issue of teens and the welfare system was fair and balanced. Following their screening of the program, they noted that the broadcaster's response to the viewer addressed her concerns about the fairness of the program clearly and completely. As a result, the regional council decided that the broadcaster did not contravene clause 7 of the CAB Code of Ethics.

Because the regional council decided that the broadcaster did not contravene the code, the broadcaster has the option of airing the decision, which will be released to the regional media.