



Tuesday, March 21, 2023

The Honourable Michael S. Kerzner
Solicitor General
George Drew Building, 18th Floor
25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Y6

via email: Michael.Kerzner@pc.ola.org

WOWC Supports Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) Funding

Dear Solicitor General Kerzner,

On behalf of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC), I am writing to you today regarding the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) funding that has been delivered by the Province of Ontario in recent years, to provide critical funding support for the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to be paired with experienced mental health professionals in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls.

Please be advised at the special meeting of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus held on March 17, 2023, the WOWC also supported a letter sent to your attention from Warden Cathy Burghardt-Jesson, of the County of Middlesex, regarding MCRT funding for the Middlesex County OPP. As this letter highlights, between 2016 and 2018, Middlesex County OPP reported a 63% increase in mental health calls, many of which resulted in unnecessary referrals to the emergency department.

As you are aware, Solicitor General, and as per our recent conversation at the ROMA 2023 Conference, the mental health and addictions epidemic is deeply affecting and impacting the communities in small and rural communities. These communities have even fewer resources to tackle this growing problem, given the lack of access to adequate community health services – and integrated mental health and addictions services – which are major barriers to reducing homelessness and poverty.

Like in Middlesex County, the WOWC's meetings with regional stakeholders – including OPP detachments across rural Western Ontario – have revealed the excellent collaboration and multi-partner efforts that are being undertaken in our region to address the growing mental health and addictions crisis. The MCRT program is one of the best examples, and the WOWC must therefore reiterate its request to the Solicitor General's Office and the Ministry of Health to be on board as full partners in helping to mitigate this crisis.

As was mentioned during our Multi-Ministerial delegation in January, the WOWC is requesting the Province's permanent funding of the MCRT programs – through annualized funding and permanently-funded mental health officer positions – using a formula based on the number of calls, population size, and geographic area. The concern expressed by our OPP detachments echoes that of Middlesex County, specifically that the application-based temporary funding for these programs is not sufficient – and ending these programs will counter the excellent work, progress and collaboration achieved over the past few years.

Our communities and our residents have felt the direct benefits from the pairing of specially trained police officers and mental-health professionals to respond to 911 emergency calls involving mental health or addictions. These impacts were instantly felt by our communities and our local emergency departments. Through immediate on-site clinical assessment of individuals in crisis, the MCRT was able to de-escalate emergent situations, avoid unnecessary apprehensions and connect individuals in crisis with the appropriate follow-up services.

As a result, the OPP detachments have increased their capacity to respond to mental health and addictions calls, increased diversion from hospitals, decreased apprehensions, and improved response to mental health and addictions crises by connecting individuals with the right care at the right time. The loss of this funding – and any further delays in making this funding permanent – will be detrimental to our small and rural communities, our local emergency departments, our health care workers, and the growing number of individuals experiencing mental health and addictions crises in our communities.

Being part of the process and the conversation will be crucial as we move forward. On behalf of the WOWC and our many regional partners, I urge you to act quickly in partnership with our communities to help us alleviate the strain of this crisis. This strong partnership between our governments will help ensure collective success for both Southwestern Ontario and the Province of Ontario as a whole.

Thank you, Solicitor General, and I look forward to your timely response and action on this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glen McNeil".

Warden Glen McNeil
Chair, Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus

cc.

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health
Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
MPPs of Western Ontario
WOWC Members