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January 25, 2016

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur
Attorney General of Ontario & Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs
Ministry of the Attorney General
720 Bay St., 11th Floor
McMurtry-Scott Building
Toronto, ON M5G 2K1

The Honourable Helena Jaczek
Minister of Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor St.
Hepburn Block, 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

The Honourable Eric Hoskins
Minister of Health and Long-term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Dear Ministers:

I am writing to you to raise awareness of the need for either a stand-alone Sexual Assault Centre or enhanced community services for sexual assault survivors in the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville. While there is a hospital-based program in Brockville, this program cannot and does not effectively serve all the survivors in this large, rural population. Survivors of sexual violence and others who are affected by sexual violence living in rural areas require a range of services similar to those found in other communities across eastern Ontario.

Currently, the Assault Response & Care Centre (ARCC) of Leeds and Grenville funded through the Brockville General Hospital is the only program available to victims of sexual assault in this enormous geographic area. At ARCC there is only one full-time counsellor to see all survivors within a population of over 100,000 people. ARCC only has funding to provide support groups for women. While these services are essential, this program cannot and does not meet all the needs of rural survivors who may face multiple barriers such as lack of transportation, isolation and poverty.



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Enhanced funding for services for survivors of sexual violence assault would enhance the counselling available in the small rural towns and villages. There is no public transportation system other than in the City of Brockville. Additional services needed include support and/or therapy groups for teenagers, men, parents, families, seniors and persons with a disability. Ongoing public education is needed to challenge the conservative and rural attitude that people don't need support and can handle their own problems. More training of service providers is needed as well as stronger links with elementary schools, high schools and the college. A funding increase would allow stronger links and partnerships with existing service providers such as municipal and provincial police, mental health and addictions services, victim services, victim witness assistance program, the women's shelter and other community services. Survivors need advocates to help them explore options, deal with the trauma as well as practical assistance with applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

It is particularly important to note the lack of specialized services for men in Leeds and Grenville. In 2011, the Ministry of the Attorney General announced funding for regional networks of services for male survivors through the lead organization Catholic Family Services. No funding was provided to any organization in Leeds and Grenville. While male survivors in other communities in Eastern Ontario have benefitted from this funding announcement, male survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse in Leeds and Grenville counties did not.

Recently, Ontario extended support for survivors of sexual violence by increasing the base funding for all 42 Sexual Assault Centres across the province by \$1.75 million per year in order to enhance their services for survivors of sexual violence. This funding was intended to improve the free and confidential services provided to victims of sexual violence, however, the rural areas of Leeds and Grenville were once again excluded from enhanced services.

There is an urgent need for either a stand-alone Sexual Assault Centre or enhancements to existing services for survivors in Leeds and Grenville. It is extremely important that survivors of sexual assault have access to the support they need in order to be able to heal and move on from their traumatic experiences. When these services are not readily available to victims, barriers such as community attitudes, poverty and lack of transportation mean they are not able to access the services in other communities. We need to acknowledge the additional barriers that the rural population face and take immediate action to address these needs.

Ottawa has three Sexual Assault Centres serving survivors in English as well as a sexual assault centre serving Francophone victims and 2 hospital-based programs serving adults and children. A survivor of sexual violence in a rural community should have the same access to both community-based and hospital-based services. Survivors living in the United Counties of Leeds

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and Grenville have very limited services available and access to those services is limited by the lack of a full range of services and by barriers such as poverty and the lack of public transportation.

We applaud the premiers Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment. We hope you will take immediate action to enhance services for survivors of sexual violence living in Leeds Grenville counties. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heidi Illingworth', written in a cursive style.

**Heidi Illingworth
Executive Director**