

# Halton police revise policy on sexual assault, with emphasis on victim support

Board provides \$15,000 to new sexual assault advisory committee

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The Halton Regional Police Service Board voted May 17 to officially revise the Halton police sexual assault investigation policy, adding a greater emphasis on victim support.

One new paragraph in the policy states "the Chief of Police shall develop and maintain service directives and procedures that safeguard victim privacy in conjunction with standards established by the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario."

Another paragraph referenced the recently created sexual assault advisory committee.

The policy refers to this committee as a community-based stakeholders group, which includes victim/survivor advocacy agencies, police and other direct service providers to survivors of sexual assault.

The committee's responsibilities are spelled out in the policy to include: ensuring that survivors of sexual assault are provided with the best support possible; determining whether sexual assault cases are being classified as they should be; and making recommendations to resolve any inappropriately classified case.

The policy revision follows a Globe and Mail report, which revealed 30 per cent of sexual assault cases

reported in Halton (about 50 cases a year) were classified as unfounded.

The report prompted an internal police audit of the handling of sexual assault cases in 2016.

Halton police have emphasized "unfounded" is a Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) term that is one way for a police service to close an occurrence.

"Unfounded" does not mean police do not believe a victim or person reporting.

They said all reported incidents are fully investigated.

The policy revisions also recognized the establishment of a victim-advocate case-review system that provides for independent evaluation by community partners of all sexual assault cases classified as unfounded to determine

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- Rob Burton, Oakville Mayor and Board Chair

whether these cases have been appropriately classified.

Another change to the policy states that the police board will be provided with an annual report on the recommendations of the sexual assault advisory committee and the findings of its victim-advocate case reviews, including:

The number of sexual assault cases reported  
The number of un-

founded cases

The number of cases independently reviewed by community partners

Actions taken to address the recommendations of the sexual assault advisory committee

The police board also voted to provide the sexual assault advisory committee with \$15,000 to compensate the various not-for-profit agencies for the use of their personnel.

"I strongly support supporting our community partners who are helping us do a better job in this area," said Oakville Mayor and board chair Rob Burton.

"This is a service we are asking our community partners to provide us in order to enhance our credibility and the quality of the job we do. I believe in paying for what we ask people to do."

The policy change and funding announcement follow Halton police's release of an information guide for victims/survivors of sexual assault.

The 20-page guide provides information about what options a victim has following a sexual assault and what they can expect

● See GUIDE, page 36

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