

Region appeals to Province for more children's mental health funding; \$12 million extra needed

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**
The Champion

The Region is taking its concerns on children's mental health services — like the need for a more co-ordinated system and increased funding — to the Province.

Halton council endorsed a lengthy motion Wednesday calling for Regional Chair Joyce Savoline to write to various higher powers at the Province expressing its worries.

Halton Child and Youth Services (HCYS) recently requested that regional council support a motion from the City of Toronto also indicating a need for more core service funding for children's mental health services.

HCYS Executive Director Ron Rodgers appeared before council to paint a picture of the grim consequences of a funding shortfall.

He said underfunding community mental health services leads to overuse of more expensive health services, inappropriate use of services that were never meant to serve the mentally ill

and tragedies like homelessness and suicide.

He noted that one in five Ontarians under 19 has a mental health disorder.

"Ontario's current mental health system has the capacity to serve fewer than one in three of these children," he said.

Mr. Rodgers said an extra \$12 million is needed for children's mental health core services, which he pointed out would only cost each Ontario taxpayer an extra \$2 per year.

The Region's health and social services committee also recently heard from local residents on the topic in a closed-door session.

"These residents shared with us their personal accounts of the problems they encountered in receiving sufficient and co-ordinated mental health services for their children," said Burlington and Regional Councillor Rick Craven.

Both Oakville Mayor and Regional Councillor Ann Mulvale and Oakville and Regional Councillor Jeff Knoll said they were "trauma-

tized" by the stories these residents told.

After hearing from the delegations, a motion was composed and supported by committee and subsequently council calling for Ms Savoline to:

- Write the premier, solicitor general, various ministers, Halton MPPs and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to express concern with the lack of a co-ordinated, integrated system for children's mental health. The letter will also address concerns with the difficulty parents are experiencing in finding mental health service for their children and note the immediate need for increased funding for core services.

- Request a meeting with the premier and ministers of health and long-term care and children and youth services, together with Halton parents, to discuss the matter.

- Write the minister of health and long-term care and CEOs of the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children and Hamilton's St. Joseph's Healthcare requesting an immediate response, given that Halton residents have attempted to secure child

and adolescent psychiatric services and have apparently not received them at both hospitals because of their (residents') addresses. This letter will also request clarification of the position of the ministry and the hospitals with respect to providing access to these services for Halton residents.

Ms Mulvale said she totally supported this action, noting there's children and families "falling through the cracks." "This clearly needs to be attended to."

Mr. Knoll also strongly supported the motion, pointing out under the current system about 66 per cent of young people with significant mental health issues are not getting the help they need.

"That's a disaster, that's a travesty," he said. "Our children are desperately in need."

Mr. Knoll called for a recorded vote on the motion, which he said he did to emphasize the importance of the issue. It carried unanimously.

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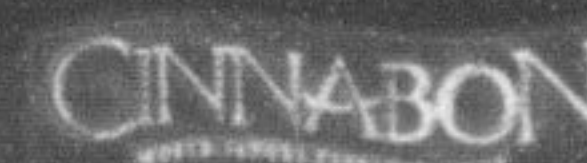


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