



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

✓ October is Child Abuse Awareness Month

Shelley Grist of the Canadian Red Cross Society accepts from Mayor Gord Krantz the official document proclaiming the month of October as Child Abuse Awareness Month.

Region wants out of GTA pooling sooner than later

Halton Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline is calling on the Province to develop a strategy so it can stop relying on Halton residents' tax dollars to finance its programs.

Part of the issue for Halton comes through what's known as GTA pooling that the Region contributes to, which helps Toronto pay for its social service programs.

Of the \$88 million Halton taxpayers spent on social service programs last year — such as children's services, social housing and Ontario Works — \$35 million of that helped fund Toronto's programs.

"An exit strategy would be especially beneficial to Halton, where pooling for social services programs in particular costs our taxpayers so much," said Ms Savoline.

Halton Commissioner of Corporate Services and Treasurer Jane MacCaskill shared similar sentiments.

"We don't think it (pooling) should be on Halton's tax base. It isn't appropriate," she said, noting Toronto's programs should instead be funded through income taxes. "We definitely want out of GTA pooling."

The larger issue that pooling is part of is the Province's requirement for all Ontario municipalities to subsidize the cost of Provincial health and social services programs from property taxes. This cost Ontario residents \$3 billion in 2003.

"It's no wonder that Ontario residents pay more property taxes than residents of any other province in Canada," said Ms

"We don't think it (pooling) should be on Halton's tax base. It isn't appropriate."

JANE MACCASKILL

Savoline.

"We need the Province to want to work on a plan that — over time, as its own fiscal condition improves — can restore the use of property taxes to municipal services such as transportation, waste management and police services."

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) has asked the Province to begin talks to develop a solution to the social and community health costs municipalities have to pay. The Region, its council and staff have thrown their full support behind AMO's initiative.

"I believe that working with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario is the best way to get this done," said Ms Savoline, who's also chair of AMO's social services task force.

"The Province's desire for effective, strengthened partnerships needs to be directed to this issue now if it is serious about helping municipalities become fiscally sustainable."

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