

March 6, 2023

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner
Solicitor General
830 Sheppard Ave. W.
Toronto, ON M3H 2T1

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

RE: Middlesex County OPP – Mobile Crisis Response Team Funding Extension

Dear Solicitor General Kerzner,

I am writing to you today as an advocate for the Middlesex County Ontario Provincial Police - Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT). As you know, this program, which partners a uniformed OPP officer with an experienced mental health professional, was established in 2019 in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls received by both the Middlesex County OPP and the Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service. Between 2016 and 2018, Middlesex OPP reported a 63% increase in mental health calls, many of which resulted in unnecessary referrals to the emergency department.

In 2019, the MCRT began as a pilot project between the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Middlesex County OPP and the Strathroy-Caradoc Police. During this period, CMHA funded the cost of one full time mental health professional to work with both police services. This individual was paired with specially trained police officers to respond to 911 emergency calls involving mental health or addictions. The impacts were instantly felt by our community and 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.

In November 2020, in recognition of the MCRT's success, the South West Local Hospital Integration Network (SW LHIN) approved permanent funding for two full time CMHA employees to work with Middlesex OPP and the Strathroy-Caradoc Police, respectively. In 2022, Middlesex County OPP applied for and received funding from your Ministry enabling it to hire a second full time CMHA employee for its service. Over the past year, this individual has been invaluable to the Middlesex MCRT. Primarily tasked with providing follow up supports to individuals in crisis, this employee has helped to enhance the secondary response to incoming calls for service, preventing subsequent 911 calls from these individuals and freeing up the remaining members of the MCRT to respond to live calls or to conduct proactive visits. With the help of this second CMHA position, the Middlesex MCRT has increased its 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 funding for Middlesex's second CMHA position expires on March 31, 2023. We urge your Ministry to consider extending this funding as the loss of this position would be detrimental to the Middlesex MCRT, our local emergency departments and, most importantly, those individuals experiencing mental health and addictions crises in our community.

I can speak personally to the impact that this program has had on individuals experiencing mental health crises in my own community. The support provided to these individuals and their families is invaluable. I hope that you will continue to support MCRTs in Ontario and specifically in Middlesex County. We know these teams are best positioned to respond to people experiencing mental health or addictions crises and we urge the province to continue to make funding for these programs a priority. I firmly believe that if we cannot properly meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens, then we have failed as local and provincial leaders.

Yours truly,



Cathy Burghardt-Jesson
Middlesex County Warden

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
MPP Rob Flack, Elgin-Middlesex-London
Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus