

Public Works News

Municipal Public Works Workers Facing Escalating Threats on the Job — AORS Calls for Provincial Action

Posted on [February 6, 2026](#)

Ontario's municipal public works professionals are used to working in challenging conditions. Snowstorms, flooding, overnight call-outs, and long hours are all part of the job.

What they should not have to face is harassment, intimidation, or threats of violence simply for doing their work.

Over the past several winter seasons, the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors (AORS) has heard from members across the province about a troubling and escalating trend: aggressive and dangerous behaviour from members of the public directed at municipal workers and subcontractors maintaining roads, sidewalks, and other critical infrastructure.

What was once the occasional frustrated complaint has evolved into a growing safety risk that is disrupting operations and, in some cases, forcing workers off job sites altogether.

What our members are experiencing

Through direct consultations with municipalities across Ontario, AORS has received reports that include:

- Individuals throwing chunks of ice at active municipal equipment
- Threats to kill sidewalk and plow operators

EVENT

CALENDAR



Local Associations

The close to home organizations where our municipal and supplier members can network and share best practices. [read more](#)

- A person climbing onto a snowplow and refusing to get off until their road was cleared first
- Staff confronted and aggressively yelled at in public spaces, including at gas stations and coffee shops
- A voicemail threatening to shoot a plow driver with a shotgun
- A resident jumping in front of an active plow during a major storm and refusing to move, delaying operations for over an hour and jeopardizing overall service levels

These examples represent only a small sample of what municipal winter maintenance crews are experiencing across the province.

When a plow is delayed or an operator feels unsafe continuing their route, it doesn't just affect one street — it impacts emergency response, school transportation, and the safety of entire communities.

Essential workers protecting essential services

During significant weather events, municipal public works staff are frontline responders. They ensure:

- Roads are open for ambulances, fire, and police
- School buses can travel safely
- Sidewalks remain accessible
- Communities stay connected

Interference with these operations is not simply a customer service issue — it is a public safety issue.

Yet, current legislation and enforcement practices do not consistently recognize the seriousness of these incidents. Some municipalities have even reported being told that unless a worker is physically assaulted, it is not considered a police matter.

Waiting until someone is hurt is not prevention.

What AORS is advocating for

AORS is calling on the Province of Ontario to strengthen protections for municipal workers and subcontractors and to take a proactive enforcement approach.





Specifically, we are advocating for:

- Enhanced legal protections when a Significant Weather Event is declared
- Recognition that interference with winter maintenance operations is a public safety risk
- Stronger enforcement tools and consequences for threats, harassment, and obstruction
- Clear direction and support from the Ontario Provincial Police and other services
- Consideration of measures similar to Manitoba's new minimum following distances for snowplows

Our actions to date

To elevate this issue, AORS has formally engaged the Province and the public.

Read more:

-  [Letter to the Minister of Labour, Training, Immigration and Skilled Trades – David Piccini](#)
-  [Letter to the Solicitor General – Michael Kerzner](#)
-  [AORS Press Release](#)
-  CBC Interviews with AORS President Karla Musso-Garcia (Links coming soon!)

In these conversations, we are making it clear: mistreatment, threats, and interference directed at municipal public works staff will not be tolerated.

Standing up for our members

Municipal public works professionals take pride in serving their communities — often working through the night and in the worst conditions to keep others safe.

They deserve to return home safely at the end of every shift.

AORS will continue to advocate strongly for the legislative, enforcement, and policy changes needed to protect the people who keep Ontario moving.

If your municipality has experienced similar incidents, we encourage you to share your story with us to help strengthen our advocacy efforts.

Council Toolkit: Draft Notice of Motion To Support Municipal Workers

To support province-wide advocacy and strengthen the collective municipal voice, AORS is encouraging councils to formally endorse protections for municipal public works workers and contractors.

Municipal resolutions help demonstrate to the Province that this is not an isolated concern, but a consistent, province-wide public safety issue impacting service delivery in communities of all sizes.

[Here is a template motion municipalities can adapt and bring forward to Council.](#)

[← Previous Post](#)

DRAFT MOTION OF SUPPORT FOR PROTECTION FOR MUNICIPAL PUBLIC WORKS WORKERS AND CONTRACTORS

Whereas municipal public works employees and contracted service providers are responsible for maintaining critical infrastructure including roads, sidewalks, bridges, drainage systems, and winter maintenance operations that are essential to public safety and emergency response; and

Whereas during significant weather events and emergencies, these workers act as frontline responders, ensuring routes remain open for ambulances, fire services, police, school transportation, and the travelling public; and

Whereas municipalities across Ontario are reporting an increase in harassment, threats, intimidation, and dangerous interference from members of the public directed at municipal workers and subcontractors while they perform their duties; and

Whereas these behaviours have included verbal abuse, threats of violence, obstruction of equipment, and actions that delay or disrupt winter maintenance and emergency response operations, placing workers and the broader public at risk; and

Whereas interference with municipal operations during storms and emergencies jeopardizes service levels, delays critical response times, and creates significant occupational health and safety risks; and

Whereas the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors (AORS) has formally called on the Province of Ontario to strengthen legislative protections, enforcement support, and consequences for those who threaten or obstruct municipal public works staff and contractors;

Now therefore be it resolved that the Council of the Municipality of Middlesex Centre supports the calls to action advanced by the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors to improve protections for municipal public works workers and subcontractors; and

Be it further resolved that the Province of Ontario be requested to introduce legislative and enforcement measures that:

- recognize municipal public works workers and contractors as essential service providers during declared significant weather events and emergencies;
- deter and penalize interference, threats, harassment, or obstruction of municipal operations; and

- provide clear direction and support to police services to proactively respond to these incidents;

And be it further resolved that a letter conveying Council's support for these measures be sent to:

- The Honourable David Piccini, Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
- The Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

And that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors and neighbouring municipalities for their consideration.



AORS
PROMOTING **KNOWLEDGE**. PURSUING **EXCELLENCE**.

January 29, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AORS Urges Respect for Municipal Public Works Operators Amid Severe Winter Conditions

ONTARIO — As winter storms continue to impact communities across Ontario, the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors (AORS) is calling on the public to treat municipal public works employees with respect while they carry out critical snow and ice control operations.

AORS has received feedback from municipalities across the province reporting incidents of harassment and verbal abuse directed at frontline public works staff during and following recent winter storms. The association stresses that this behaviour is unacceptable and undermines the essential work being done to keep communities safe.

“Municipal plow operators are working long hours in difficult and often dangerous conditions, navigating severe storms, reduced visibility, and equipment challenges — all while doing their best to keep roads passable,” said **Karla Musso-Garcia, CRS-I**, President of AORS and Operations Manager for the Township of Oro-Medonte. “This winter has been particularly challenging, with repeated storm events and a provincewide salt shortage adding to the complexity of operations. These employees are part of the communities they serve, and they deserve patience, respect, and appreciation — not harassment.”

Municipal public works employees are responsible for clearing roads that allow residents to get to work, children to get to school, and essential services to function. Their role becomes even more critical during severe weather events.

“In a winter storm, municipal plow operators are often the first line of response,” said **Kelly Elliott**, Interim Executive Director of AORS. “They are the ones emergency services rely on to access roads, reach hospitals, and respond to urgent calls. Police, fire, and paramedic services regularly depend on municipal equipment operators for assistance. In many cases, their work can make the difference when seconds truly count.”

AORS is also reminding the public that safe winter driving behaviour plays a key role in protecting both road users and the workers operating heavy equipment.

Tips for sharing the road with snow plows include:

- Give plows plenty of space and never tailgate
- Be aware that snow plows may need to **slow down, stop, or back up at intersections**
- Never assume a plow operator can see you — visibility can be limited due to equipment size, snow spray, and weather conditions

- A good rule of thumb: **if you cannot see the snow plow's mirrors on both sides, the operator cannot see you**
- Do not attempt to pass a plow unless it is safe and legal to do so

If residents have concerns about snow or ice removal in their community, AORS encourages them to contact their local municipality directly through established customer service channels, such as municipal websites or service request systems. Frontline operators are not responsible for policy decisions and should not be the target of frustration.

"Respect on the road keeps everyone safer," added Musso-Garcia. "A little patience goes a long way during winter weather."

AORS extends its appreciation to municipal public works professionals across Ontario who continue to work tirelessly during challenging winter conditions to keep communities moving and safe.

About AORS

The Association of Ontario Road Supervisors (AORS) represents municipal public works professionals across Ontario, providing training, advocacy, and professional development to support safe, efficient, and sustainable municipal infrastructure.

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Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development David Piccini
14th Floor, 400 University Avenue
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

February 5, 2026

Dear Minister Piccini,

On behalf of Ontario's municipal public works professionals, we are writing to raise an urgent health and safety concern that is increasingly placing municipal workers and subcontractors at risk while they maintain the critical infrastructure our communities rely on every day.

While the Occupational Health and Safety Act establishes important protections against workplace hazards, it does not adequately address a growing and very real threat: unsafe working conditions created by interference, harassment, and dangerous actions from members of the public.

Through consultations with AORS members across the province, we are hearing consistent and deeply troubling examples of escalating behaviour directed at municipal workers - particularly winter maintenance operators. These are not isolated incidents, but a pattern that is becoming increasingly normalized during significant weather events. Examples reported to AORS include:

- An individual throwing a large chunk of ice at an active piece of municipal equipment while it was operating.
- A resident threatening to kill a sidewalk plow operator.
- A man climbing onto a snow plow and refusing to get off until the operator agreed to plow his road next.
- Two municipal staff members being confronted, accosted, and aggressively yelled at in public - one at a gas station and another while simply standing in line for coffee - by individuals angry about road conditions that were not even under that municipality's jurisdiction, as well as a mailbox that had been struck.
- A voicemail left by a resident threatening to shoot a municipal plow driver with a shotgun the next time the street was plowed.
- A resident angry about snow at the end of their driveway jumping in front of an active plow and refusing to move. The plow was delayed for over an hour during a major snow event, placing service levels and the municipality's overall emergency response at risk. The situation was only resolved once supervisors and by-law officers arrived on scene.

These incidents represent only a small sample of what municipal plow drivers and winter maintenance crews are experiencing across Ontario. What was once limited to disgruntled complaints has escalated into direct threats, physical interference, and dangerous confrontations that place workers, subcontractors, and the public at risk. This issue is becoming a systematic threat to municipal service delivery and is only amplified during significant weather events.

Municipal workers and their contracted partners are responsible for maintaining roads, bridges, sidewalks, and other essential services - often in extreme weather and high-risk environments. When these workers are threatened or obstructed, it becomes not only a workplace safety issue, but a broader public safety concern. In some cases, conditions have become so unsafe that

municipal staff and subcontractors have walked off job sites, jeopardizing timely service delivery during critical events.

We respectfully ask the Province to consider the following changes:

- Under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, when a municipality declares a Significant Weather Event, municipal winter maintenance vehicles and operators - including subcontractors working on behalf of municipalities - should be afforded enhanced protection, with interference or obstruction treated with the same severity as interference with police, fire, or paramedic services.
- Establish clear public-safety interference provisions, similar in intent to Ontario's Slow Down, Move Over legislation, that recognize the essential role of municipal roadside workers.
- Consider adopting provisions similar to Manitoba's recently passed Bill 38, an amendment to their Highway Traffic Act effective January 1, 2026, which requires motorists to maintain a minimum distance of 30 metres behind snowplows where speed limits are 80 km/h or lower, and 100 metres where speed limits exceed 80 km/h.

These changes would provide clarity, deterrence, and enforceability—sending a strong message that interference with municipal workers performing essential services will not be tolerated. Just as Ontario protects first responders from obstruction during emergencies, we must extend similar protections to the public works professionals who keep our communities safe, connected, and functioning.

AORS would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss these concerns further and to collaborate on legislative solutions that better protect municipal workers and subcontractors while strengthening public safety across the province.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Karla Musso-Garcia, CRS-I
President, Association of Ontario Road Supervisors
Operations Manager, Township of Oro-Medonte



Kelly Elliott
Interim Executive Director
Association of Ontario Road Supervisors

Cc (via e-mail)

Premier Doug Ford

Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response Jill Dunlop

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Rob Flack

Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sarkaria

Acting Minister of Infrastructure Todd McCarthy

Scott Butler, Good Roads Executive Director

Walid Abou-Hamde, Ontario Road Builders' Association Chief Executive Officer



Solicitor General of Ontario Michael Kerzner
George Drew Building, 25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

February 5, 2026

Dear Solicitor General Kerzner,

On behalf of Ontario's municipal public works professionals, we are writing to raise serious concerns regarding the safety of municipal workers and subcontractors who are increasingly facing harassment, threats, and dangerous interference from members of the public while delivering essential municipal services - particularly during winter maintenance and emergency operations.

Across Ontario, municipal public works teams are responsible for maintaining critical infrastructure that residents depend on every day, including roads, sidewalks, bridges, and drainage systems. During significant weather events, these workers are frontline responders, ensuring emergency vehicles can travel safely and that communities remain connected and accessible. However, the behaviour directed at them has escalated well beyond routine complaints and has become a direct threat to both worker safety and public safety.

Through consultations with AORS members province-wide, we continue to receive troubling reports that illustrate the seriousness of this issue. These include:

- An individual throwing a large chunk of ice at an active piece of municipal equipment while it was operating.
- A resident threatening to kill a sidewalk plow operator.
- A man climbing onto a snowplow and refusing to get off until the driver agreed to plow his road next.
- Two staff members confronted and aggressively accosted in public - one at a gas station and another while simply waiting in line for coffee - by individuals angry about road conditions and a mailbox strike that were not even related to that municipality.
- A voicemail threatening to shoot a plow driver with a shotgun the next time the street was plowed.
- A resident jumping in front of an active plow during a major snow event and refusing to move, delaying operations for over an hour and jeopardizing service levels and overall emergency response.

These examples represent only a small sample of the experiences municipal plow drivers and winter maintenance crews are facing across the province. What was once occasional frustration has escalated into intimidation, threats of violence, and direct interference with equipment and operations.

Equally concerning is that municipalities do not always receive consistent enforcement support when these incidents occur. We have heard directly from members who contacted the Ontario Provincial Police for assistance and were advised that, unless a physical assault had already taken place, the situation was "not a police matter." Waiting until a worker has been physically harmed before intervention is neither preventative nor acceptable.

This gap leaves municipalities and workers vulnerable and sends an unintended message that threatening or obstructive behaviour toward municipal staff carries little consequence. It also places supervisors and by-law officers in situations that may exceed their authority or capacity to manage safely.

We believe a proactive and coordinated response is needed. Municipal workers and their subcontractors should not have to choose between their personal safety and providing critical services during storms and emergencies.

We respectfully ask that the Province of Ontario and the Ontario Provincial Police take a clear and strong stance that interference, threats, and harassment directed at municipal public works staff will not be tolerated. Specifically, we would welcome:

- Clear direction and guidance to police services, including the OPP, that threats, intimidation, and obstruction of municipal workers performing essential duties warrant timely enforcement and support.
- Recognition that interference with winter maintenance and emergency public works operations presents a broader public safety risk, not merely a municipal operational issue.
- Enhanced coordination between municipalities and local police services during significant weather events and emergency responses to ensure worker safety and continuity of service.
- Consideration of legislative or policy tools that provide stronger deterrence and consequences for those who threaten or obstruct municipal staff and contractors.

Municipal public works professionals are essential workers. They keep roads open for ambulances, fire trucks, school buses, and the travelling public. Their safety should be treated with the same seriousness as that of other frontline responders.

AORS would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss these concerns and explore practical steps to ensure consistent enforcement support and stronger protections for municipal workers across Ontario.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your continued leadership in public safety.

Sincerely,



Karla Musso-Garcia, CRS-I
President, Association of Ontario Road Supervisors
Operations Manager, Township of Oro-Medonte



Kelly Elliott
Interim Executive Director
Association of Ontario Road Supervisors

Cc (via e-mail)
Premier Doug Ford