



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

*Mike Morrice*

Member of Parliament  
Kitchener Centre

The Honourable Marci Ien  
Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

**RE: Urgent Need for Operational Funding for Frontline Service Organizations in Waterloo Region Working to End Gender-Based Violence**

Dear Minister Ien,

I hope this letter finds you well. Like me, I know you are deeply concerned about the alarming and ongoing epidemic of gender-based violence (GBV) in our country. I'm writing today to urge you to help address this epidemic by ensuring organizations providing essential services to GBV survivors have access to stable and consistent operational funding to carry out their life-saving work. I share this because of my concern about the prospects for success of your ministry's National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence, particularly as demand for services is increasing but funding remains stagnant, and as collaboration across levels of government is critical but provincial governments – like in our home province of Ontario – reject bold and urgent action. The National Action Plan relies significantly on the actions of province and territories to combat GBV, but there are clear signs that Ontario is not going to be proactive in addressing this ongoing crisis.

There is an urgent need to end the GBV and intimate partner violence (IPV) epidemic not only because it causes significant and often intergenerational harm, but because it costs lives. As of 2022, it is estimated that one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours in Canada, primarily by men. These deaths are unacceptable because they are entirely preventable, provided there is bold action by all levels of government.

While Budget 2022 proposed a federal investment of \$539.3 million over five years, starting in 2022/23, to support provinces and territories in their efforts to implement the National Action Plan, my concerns are the likelihood of any of these funds flowing to organizations in my community doing critical, life-saving frontline work and the increasing service demands faced by these organizations. I have heard these concerns directly from numerous local service organizations active in my constituency. For example, the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region is *currently operating with nearly 20% less provincial funding (adjusted for inflation) than a decade ago, while demand for their services has tripled over this time. This has resulted in a current waitlist for services of more than 300 survivors of sexual violence.*

I am also extremely troubled by a series of recent developments in Ontario and in Waterloo Region, where my constituency is located, that underpin the serious threats of violence women, trans and non-binary people continue to face in my community and across Canada; that suggest federal funding is not being directed towards critical service organizations; and that raise significant concerns about the willingness of the provincial government to be an active partner in addressing this crisis. Specifically:

- In March 2019, *Ontario's tri-cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge ranked as the least safe and least healthy place for women in Canada among the 26 largest metro areas.* Alarming, reports of sexual assault, criminal harassment targeting women, and IPV in these cities were among the highest of all cities included in the study.

- In February 2023, the Ontario government responded to a call to provide consistent and stable funding for frontline IPV service providers by saying that it had endorsed the National Action Plan and planned to “leverage this opportunity” to collaborate with community groups and other levels of government. *No further actions on this have been announced by the provincial government since, and further consultations with community groups and other levels of government are nowhere near the proactive, bold action that is required to meet this crisis.* Moreover, despite the fact that my community was ranked as least safe for women in 2019, GBV and IPV service organizations there have said they were not consulted regarding the development or implementation of the National Action Plan, raising concerns about its approach and whether funding provided through it to provinces will effectively reach those working on the front lines where we need it most.
- In June 2023, a 24-year-old student at the University of Waterloo entered an undergraduate gender studies class with more than 40 students present and stabbed three people, including the female professor, a female student and a male student. *Police said that the accused targeted the class as a “hate-motivated incident related to gender expression and gender identity.”* Reports from students have described the attacker as smiling as he pulled his knife out in the classroom.
- In June 2023, the Ontario government rejected many of the 86 recommendations made by a coroner’s inquest into the death of three women at the hands of a man with a long history of stalking and domestic violence convictions aimed at combatting increasing levels of IPV. Advocates for ending the epidemic of GBV and IPV called the Ontario government’s response a “disservice to victims.” *This included rejecting recommendations aimed at strengthening preventative measures, including formally declaring IPV an epidemic; establishing an IPV commission; and creating an IPV advocate at the provincial level.* While there has been discussion by Waterloo Region to declare GBV and IPV an epidemic, as has been done at municipal and regional levels elsewhere in Ontario, I am concerned that this lack of provincial leadership will be detrimental to the collective efforts that are necessary to effectively confront this crisis.

In light of this reality in my community and our province, and after hearing the concerns of frontline service organizations in my constituency directly, I am deeply concerned about the prospects for success of the National Action Plan. What we need most is dependable operating funding for service organizations and bold action from all levels of government, not more ribbon cutting. **I am calling on you and your ministry to take a leadership role in ensuring that any federal funding in this area is primarily used by provinces and territories to provide frontline GBV and IPV service organizations with consistent, stable, and ongoing operational funding.** These service organizations provide critical health, safety, and support services to both prevent GBV and IPV, and to support victims of it, so we must ensure that they have reliable and predictable funding to be most effective.

**I am also calling on you and your ministry to develop a mechanism to facilitate this consistent, stable and ongoing operational funding that requires co-investment from other levels of government and includes robust accountability for funds to be provided to these organizations.** This mechanism may be available through the existing elements of the National Action Plan or amendments to it, or through an entirely new mechanism outside of the National Action Plan. Critically, the National Action Plan or any new mechanism will only be successful at eliminating GBV and IPV if provincial, territorial and municipal governments are proactive, invested partners in achieving positive results.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this proposal for a new or renewed mechanism aimed at ensuring more urgent, bold and collaborative action across levels of government to address this ongoing crisis.

Sincerely,



Member of Parliament  
Kitchener Centre

Cc:

Jennifer Hutton, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

Jennifer Breaton, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo

Sara Casselman, Executive Director, Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region

Fauzia Mazhar, Executive Director, Coalition of Muslim Women Kitchener-Waterloo

Lynda Abshoff, Executive Director, Brain Injury Association of Waterloo-Wellington

TK Pritchard, Executive Director, SHORE Centre

Courtney Waterfall, Chapter Director, Shelter Movers Southwestern Ontario

Amanda Cook, Director, Sexual Violence Prevention & Response, University of Waterloo