



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Mike Morrice

Member of Parliament
Kitchener Centre

The Honourable Arif Virani
Minister of Justice

June 18, 2024

RE: Urgent Need to Fund Sexual Violence Legal Advocate Programs

Dear Minister Virani,

I am writing to urge the Department of Justice to open a dedicated funding envelope at your earliest opportunity, and at the latest to be included in the 2024 Fall Economic Statement to support Sexual Violence Legal Advocate (SVLA) programs at independent, community-based sexual assault support centres across Canada. Funding these programs will ensure that survivors receive the holistic support they need to navigate the legal system and rebuild their lives, enhancing public trust and encouraging more survivors to come forward.

The SVLA Program at the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region supports survivors in understanding their legal options and provides help with police reporting, emotional support, case management, individual advocacy, document assistance, and court accompaniment. Since its launch in October 2021, the program has significantly impacted the community, serving over 100 clients each year, and extending its services across Ontario.

Despite its success, the SVLA program is currently sustained only by fundraising dollars. Given the vital need for these services, it is imperative that the Department of Justice ensures stable funding for these programs. The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres has endorsed the SVLA Program as best practice and encouraged governments to invest in this model across Ontario.

We know many survivors are reluctant to report their experience to authorities. A study conducted by Justice Canada reveals that two-thirds of victims lack confidence in both the court process and the justice system. This lack of confidence stems from a range of factors, including

disbelief in their testimonies, feelings of shame or embarrassment, mistrust in the criminal justice system, fear of the perpetrator, and a lack of support.

Marginalized communities, such as racialized individuals, people with disabilities, and those from lower-income backgrounds, face compounded barriers in accessing justice. Understanding these challenges, the SVLA program aims to provide comprehensive culturally responsive support services, free of charge, catering to survivors of all genders.

Community-based sexual assault centres prioritize a survivor-centered approach, focusing on the individual needs and well-being of survivors. This contrasts with the institutional focus of police and victim services, which may emphasize procedural and legal outcomes over personalized support.

By housing the SVLA program within independent, community-based sexual assault centres, we can provide more empathetic, comprehensive, and survivor-focused services, ultimately leading to better outcomes for survivors of sexual violence. These centres prioritize a survivor-centered approach, focusing on the individual needs and well-being of survivors, which contrasts with the institutional focus of police and victim services.

Your leadership in this matter would demonstrate a profound commitment to addressing the needs of sexual violence survivors and ensuring equitable access to justice for all Canadians.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and your team to discuss this further. Thank you for the work you do in service of Canadians.

Sincerely,



Mike Morrice
MP for Kitchener Centre

cc: Hon. Marci Ien
Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

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

Joanna Brant & Elise Hineman
Co-Chairs, Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres