

April 26, 2017

Honourable Jane Philpott
Federal Minister of Health
Government of Canada
6060 Main Street
Stouffville, Ontario, L4A 1B8

Dear Minister Philpott,

Re: Request For Additional Provincial Funding For Child And Youth Mental Health Services

At the April 12, 2017 School District No. 42 Board of Education meeting trustees discussed a letter sent to your office by our colleagues in School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay) and circulated to all other BC Boards of Education. Our Board is unanimous in supporting their request for further resources to address what has become a critical gap in services for our youth.

To illustrate how great the need is in our own community of 104,000 an ad hoc committee of local professionals and non profit agencies have come together to address at least some of the lack of available resources. A youth wellness centre staffed with a psychiatrist one day per week has been located in a local youth recreation centre to meet a portion of the current backlog. Previous wait times for youth being referred by school counsellors and others were frequently several months in duration; definitely not appropriate for a young person in crisis. The centre has been established and operated entirely through local fundraising and only recently received a one time grant of \$30,000 from the provincial government. This was an appreciated gesture to be sure but not a commitment to provide an important and needed service through our health care system on an ongoing basis.

Well over 150 young people have been referred to the centre since it opened in May of 2016 and now it too is experiencing backlogs. This situation simply isn't good enough. Citizens should not have to raise funds through donations and fundraising dinners to provide a service which should be provided through our health care system. Our youth shouldn't have to face such a lack of service that the community around them have felt compelled to take matters into their own hands. The intent of the group is to respond to some of the unmet needs of our youth and demonstrate as clearly as possible to government how critical the need is. If the project receives no more substantive support from government eventually the centre will have to be closed. At that point the level of frustration experienced by citizens in our community will be significant. More importantly the youth currently being served will be left out in the cold. None of us wish to be responsible for the consequences of that neglect.

Recently we heard from several of our school counsellors who continually decry the lack of community support services and the load they are being asked to address with limited resources and training in mental health intervention therapies. They spoke to us of their own feelings of guilt at being unable to address all of the critical needs they face with very limited community resources available to help. Since they are often the point of first contact for a young person in crisis they need to be able to make referrals to agencies in the community who can provide the kind of quick and intense response which is often required. Our counsellors are currently feeling quite alone in this challenge and referenced a recent series of articles published in The Province which highlighted the lack of required resources in British Columbia:

<http://www.theprovince.com/news/local+news/youth+depression+crucial+intervene+early/13303184/story.html>

We are in complete agreement with the recommendations of the bi partisan select standing committee on children and youth to which the SD5 board refers and wish to add our own voice to their expression of the immediate need to make a greater investment in the mental wellness of the young people living in our community, province and country. Please give every consideration to addressing this urgent need in collaboration with the provincial health authorities.

We will be sharing this correspondence with the provincial government once the current election is over and look forward to your collaborative response.

Sincerely,



Mike Murray, Chairperson
Board of Education

cc

Board of Education of School District No. 42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
Mr. Dan Ruimy, MP (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
District Parent Advisory Council
District Student Advisory Council
Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Community Services – Youth Wellness Centre Committee
Maple Ridge Teachers' Association
CUPE Local 703
Board of Education of School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay)
BC School Trustees' Association
BC School Trustees' Association for distribution to All Boards of Education
Mr. Doug Bing (Liberal Candidate – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
Mr. Marc Dalton (Liberal Candidate – Maple Ridge-Mission)
Ms. Lisa Beare (NDP Candidate – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
Mr. Bob D'Éith (NDP Candidate – Maple Ridge-Mission)
Mr. Peter Tam (Green Party Candidate – Maple Ridge-Mission)
Mr. Alex Pope (Green Party Candidate – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
Mr. Steve Ranta (Independent Candidate – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
Mr. Trevor Hamilton (Conservative Candidate – Maple Ridge-Mission)
Mr. Gary John O'Driscoll, (Conservative Candidate – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)