



**MPP Jennie Stevens**  
St. Catharines

**MPP Jill Andrew**  
Toronto–St. Paul's

Ministry of Health  
5775 Yonge Street - 16th Floor  
Toronto Ontario M7A 2E5

September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear Minister Jones,

We write to you jointly, as the MPP for St. Catharines and the Official Opposition Critic for Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, with grave concern regarding news out of the Niagara Region last week. Reports revealed that the Niagara Health's Sexual Assault Domestic Violence unit at the St. Catharines General Hospital had to turn away survivors seeking a Sexual Assault Evidence Kit. Survivors were reportedly asked to travel to Hamilton or Burlington to receive kits, or come back the next day, as the unit did not have the capacity to provide this urgent care.

Sexual assault shatters people's lives, and the impact of this violence must never be minimized. The rates of post-traumatic stress disorder for survivors of rape are incredibly high. Their road to trauma recovery is long, confusing, often volatile, and immensely difficult. It is with this in mind and heart that we, as leaders, must work together to ease this path for survivors and remove each and every barrier we can along the way.

What happened in the Niagara Region did the opposite. It very likely compounded the trauma of those who took the difficult first step towards justice and recovery, only to find they were unable to access a Sexual Assault Evidence Kit when they needed it. To then be asked to leave their community and travel an hour away to receive one in either Burlington or Hamilton, or return to the unit the next day, is beyond comprehension. Imagine the horror of a survivor having to avoid changing their clothes or showering after being assaulted to preserve evidence while they waited hour after agonizing hour.

We are devastated for the people who faced this barrier. It sends a harmful signal to survivors that their trauma was not worth reporting, their story not worth telling, and their recovery through justice not worth the investment it takes. No survivor should ever be asked to travel or wait to get the immediate support they need.

As Health Minister, you have the power to protect survivors from their nightmare being intensified and prolonged like this. Ontarians deserve answers and assurances. They need to know: are survivors being turned away from other hospitals in Ontario? What are you doing to stop survivors from being turned away from the hospital in St. Catharines, and anywhere else in the province where this is happening?

On behalf of Ontario women, LGBTQIA2S+ and gender diverse folks, and all survivors, we must be assured that what occurred in Niagara Region will not happen again anywhere in this province. We must be assured that your government will take all necessary and urgent steps to ensure rape crisis centres and hospitals are equipped with the tools, funding, and staff to provide care to all those who require it — when they do and in their community.

Urgent next steps include the immediate repeal of Bill 124 so we can recruit, retain, and return nurses to the sector, which will help keep hospitals and community care centres operating at their full capacity ensuring necessary care can continue uninterrupted. It is also imperative that the government restore funding to sexual assault crisis centres, as well as providing the 30 per cent increase called for by the sector. Sexual assault recovery often requires a comprehensive approach involving both treatment *and* crisis centre services, both of which are stretched thin province-wide.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing back with your immediate plans to remedy this preventable tragedy.

Sincerely,

MPP Jennie Stevens, St. Catharines

MPP Jill Andrew, Toronto–St. Paul's  
Official Opposition Critic for Women's Social and Economic Opportunity