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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE: A Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking in Peel Region - Update**

**FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide Regional Council with a status update on the implementation of the Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking in Peel Region and the creation of the Peel Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Task Force.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Regional Council endorsed the Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking ('Strategy') and approved \$1.8M in annual funding for a three-year pilot.
  - While work continues to implement the Strategy, there has been a delay with some actions due to the impact of COVID-19.
  - Two of the Strategy's three pillars, Intervention and Exits/Housing are on track. The Safe House opened on April 15, 2020 and the Service Hub and Transitional House is scheduled to open in late Fall 2020. The Prevention pillar is currently paused.
  - The Peel Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force was launched with decision-makers from across relevant sectors in Ontario, to advocate and encourage positive action.
  - On March 6, 2020 the Province announced their Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy: 2020-2025; the focus of the strategy is in alignment with the work being done in Peel Region.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

In 2017, the Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee delegated to Regional Council to highlight the gaps in programs and services that address the issue of human sex trafficking. As a follow-up to the presentation, staff conducted an environmental scan and found that while there were several community organizations doing important work in this area, there were two persistent gaps. Specifically, the system of services for survivors is difficult to navigate, and the lack of dedicated housing options presents an immediate barrier for survivors to exit from human sex trafficking.

In June 2018, Regional Council endorsed the Strategy and is funding a three-year pilot of dedicated services. The Strategy includes the implementation and operation of one safe/emergency house, one transition house, and one dedicated services hub.

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### **2. Strategy Update**

The Strategy falls under the Region's 2018-2022 Term of Council Priority 'Advance Community Safety and Well-being'. It includes the following three pillars: Prevention, Intervention and Exits/Housing. Implementation of dedicated services and supports under the Intervention and Exits/Housing pillars are currently in progress and will be complete by late Fall 2020. The work that started to raise awareness of human sex trafficking among staff and the community, and to provide training for frontline service providers, is now on hold.

#### **a) Prevention**

To increase awareness of human sex trafficking through coordinated prevention and education programming, staff is working with the Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee to implement this pillar. A list of organizations that have representation on the Committee is attached as Appendix I.

- The Region of Peel is taking a two-pronged approach to both raise awareness among Regional staff, through an e-learning module, and to provide targeted in-person training for front line service providers.
- The Regional website hosts awareness e-learning modules for community partners, key organizations in Peel as well as other municipalities across Ontario who have expressed an interest.
- Approximately, 150 Regional employees have completed the e-learning module, either in person or as part of a team meeting.
- Further, representatives from the Region and the Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee delegated to the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and the Peel District School Board to seek support for the implementation of prevention education programming. This approach is in alignment with the Provincial mandate and the updated 2019 Elementary Health and Physical Education Curriculum. In response to the delegations, the school boards have indicated their support in working with Regional staff and the Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee to collaborate on prevention education in schools.

The further roll out of training is currently paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **b) Intervention**

To increase access to dedicated and reliable services that are easy to navigate for victims/survivors.

- This pillar includes a three-year pilot for a dedicated services hub for individuals at-risk, engaged in, and transitioning out of human sex trafficking. The hub will offer centralized coordination, system navigation, case management, trauma counselling and outreach.
- The hub will also host community partners who will provide in-kind complementary services on-site such as basic health care, addictions support, legal aid, education, life skills and employment support.
- Through a competitive procurement process, the contract for the administration of the hub was awarded to Catholic Family Services of Peel-Dufferin.
- Renovations, staff training, and identification of complementary services are all underway to support opening of the service hub in late Fall 2020.

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### **c) Exits/Housing**

To increase access to dedicated, safe and supportive housing for victims/survivors.

- The Exits/Housing pillar includes a three-year pilot for one safe/emergency house, and one transitional house.
- Through a competitive procurement process, Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel-Halton (Elizabeth Fry) was awarded the contract to operate both the safe house and the transitional house.
- The safe/emergency house, owned and operated by Elizabeth Fry, opened on April 15, 2020 and provides immediate, safe housing for female victims/survivors for up to six months.
- The transitional house, owned by the Region of Peel and operated by Elizabeth Fry, is currently undergoing renovations and is set to be operational by late Fall 2020.
- Female survivors can access transitional housing for up to two years with the aim of gaining independence through securing permanent, stable housing in the community, with connections to priority status on the Centralized Waiting List.
- A maximum of six survivors can be housed at each house at any given time; it is important to ensure each victim/survivor has their own room to nurture a sense of security. In addition, the low number of survivors in the house decreases the chances of being re-recruited. While the need in the community is greater, the model aligns with best practices as successfully implemented in other communities.
- The Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee is planning to convene a provincial housing table, which will include all service providers who administer housing to survivors of human sex trafficking in Ontario. This initiative aims to streamline referrals and identify vacancies across the province.

### **3. Advocacy**

The Region of Peel is the first municipality to develop and lead an anti-human sex trafficking strategy. Staff have engaged several cross-sectoral stakeholders to share the Strategy across Ontario. The intent of advocacy is to seek and secure sustainable funding to ensure dedicated services remain in Peel on a long-term basis.

Some highlights of the advocacy engagements include meetings with:

- The Office of the Premier;
- Minister Dunlop, Co-Lead of the Ontario Human Trafficking Strategy, Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues;
- The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking; and,
- Advocacy at the 2019 AMO Conference, with the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and the Minister of Education.

Presentations have been delivered to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Board of Directors; the Ontario Municipal Urban Human Services Commissioner's meeting and at the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) Leadership Meeting, which was held in conjunction with the Ontario Indigenous Federation of Friendship Centres.

Advocacy through conferences such as those held by the Ontario Association of Social Workers is planned. This opportunity will raise awareness of the Strategy and the dedicated services model as well as promote the Canadian Human Trafficking hotline as the main point of contact for information and referral (1-833-900-1010).

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On March 6, 2020 the Province announced their Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy: 2020-2025. It was recently confirmed that implementation of the strategy will continue during the pandemic. The Ontario Strategy aligns well with Peel's strategy, particularly with the focus on raising awareness of the issue, protecting victims and intervening early, and supporting survivors. Further, the announcement detailed up to \$6M per year in new funding that would be available through a Community-Supports Fund. Details of how to apply for this funding are expected to be released shortly.

Working with key partners and stakeholders, the Region of Peel will continue to seek advocacy opportunities to gain federal and provincial support to help advance the Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking in Peel. This includes continued advocacy to secure long-term sustainable funding for the services hub for individuals at-risk, engaged in, and transitioning out of human sex trafficking.

### **4. Peel Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Task Force**

To ensure the Strategy is well-informed, the Region of Peel has taken an advocacy role in bringing together decision-makers with governmental reach to form the Peel Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Task Force. It has a high-level systems lens which includes senior staff from the health, legal, education and social services sectors, academics/researchers and the meaningful involvement of survivors.

The mandate of the task force is to:

- Seek and secure sustainable funding for the housing and hub services.
- Champion the issue beyond Peel to advocate for replication of the Strategy across Ontario.
- Identify opportunities to increase awareness across sectors and to encourage action.

The membership currently includes representation from the Region of Peel (Co-chair); Peel Regional Police (Co-Chair); RCMP; Ontario Provincial Police; the Peel Crown Attorney's Office, Ministry of the Attorney General; a Survivor Advocate and International Disrupter; a Region of Peel Councillor; the Dalla Lana School of Public Health; Women's College Research Institute; Peel's Medical Officer of Health; Program Chief of Mental Health, Trillium Health Partners; Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Coordination Office; Ontario Association of Social Workers; Peel School Boards and Peel Children's Aid Society.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Regional Council endorsed the Strategy and approved \$1.8M in annual funding for the three-year pilot through the 2019 Budget process, with an expectation that funding could be secured from other sources during this period. As noted in the report, efforts continue with respect to advocating for funding from other levels of government. Work in building awareness, supporting Strategy implementation and the ongoing monitoring of outcomes is being done by a contract staff position. Interest in the Strategy from both within and external to the Peel community has been high and it is expected that it will continue unabated, as such the contract position will be converted to a permanent position with no net budget impact.

## **CONCLUSION**

Regional Council's endorsement of the Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking, along with the approval of the funding for the three-year pilot has positioned the Region of Peel to be the first municipality in Ontario to formalize a Strategy to address human sex trafficking. Through

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this commitment, the Region is raising awareness of this issue and supporting victims and survivors with starting a new chapter of their lives.

### **APPENDECIES**

Appendix I – Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee Membership

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#### ***Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:***

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



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N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer