
REPORT TITLE: **Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy 2022 Update**

FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Region of Peel’s Anti-Human Sex Trafficking pilot, which was endorsed by Regional Council on June 14, 2018 (Resolution 2018-556), be approved as a permanent, program.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In June 2018, Peel Regional Council endorsed ‘A Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking in Peel’ three-year pilot to implement and operate a safe/emergency house, a transition house, and a dedicated service hub.
- The pilots’ evaluation findings indicate that the Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy is successful in achieving its intended outcome to increase awareness and coordinated access to dedicated and dignified services to victims, survivors, and those at-risk of sex trafficking in Peel.
- The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the need for service provision and housing for human sex trafficking survivors in Peel.
- This report seeks approval for a permanent annual program in Peel that will ensure the long-term sustainability of needed services and supports to those impacted by human sex trafficking.
- The 2022 budget for the Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy is \$2,188,731 consisting of \$1,384,274 for housing operations (one safe/emergency house and one transitional house) and \$804,457 for the integrated services hub including the salary and benefit of one full time position.
- The 2022 Regional portion for this program is \$858,454 as there is \$730,277 in provincial funding and a \$600,000 draw from regional reserves that is planned to be phased out by 2026.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

In June 2018, Peel Regional Council endorsed ‘A Strategy to Address Human Sex Trafficking in Peel Region’ (Resolution 2018-556) (nee ‘the Strategy’) three-year pilot to support the provision of dedicated wrap around services, safe/emergency housing, and a transitional house. The Strategy is anchored by the following pillars:

- a) **Prevention** - advocates for increased awareness of human sex trafficking
- b) **Intervention** - improve access to dedicated and reliable services for victims, survivors, and those at-risk of human sex trafficking

Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy 2022 Update

- c) **Exits/Housing** - provides dedicated safe and supportive housing options for victims/survivors

Implementation of the three-year pilot program in Peel addresses the impacts of this pervasive crime. The intended outcome of the pilot program is to increase awareness of human sex trafficking in Peel; to increase collaboration and coordination across the service providers responding to human sex trafficking in Peel; and improve access to services and supports for victims, survivors, and those at-risk of sex trafficking. Key milestones of the pilot were successfully reached with both the opening of the Safe and Transition House and the integrated services hub. The provision of the dedicated housing options and services are specifically designed to address the complex needs of sex trafficked girls and women.

2. Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Evaluation Findings

At the onset of the pilot implementation, a third-party vendor was contracted to carry out a multi-phased evaluation on the intended outcome of the Strategy. The scope of the Strategy evaluations include:

1. Evaluation of the three Pillars.
2. Monitoring implementation to understand areas for improvement.
3. Assessing increased awareness through education, supports and services that aid victims and survivors, and enhance relationships between community partners.

Findings from the preliminary evaluations are as follows:

a) Prevention

The Prevention pillar is designed to increase awareness of human sex trafficking through coordinated prevention and educational programming. A range of activities that includes a social media campaign, awareness and advocacy workshops, and training sessions for staff and the public were utilized. Approximately 755 attendees participated across 17 advocacy and engagement events between September 2019 and March 2020 in efforts to increase awareness in the Peel community. The Region of Peel held various internal and external training activities in the form of online learning modules (e-modules) and virtual/in-person training sessions with approximately 280 Regional staff attending. Results from internal staff training surveys indicated that ninety-three percent of participants had increased capability to identify warning signs of human sex trafficking and eighty-nine percent reported feeling more equipped to interact with at-risk individuals. Education, awareness, and training activities will continue to expand in Peel as advocacy and awareness activities reconvene during the restorative phases of the pandemic.

b) Intervention

The Intervention pillar is designed to increase access to dedicated and reliable services that are easy to navigate for victims and survivors. The integrated services hub, launched in December 2020, provides co-located, wrap-around services that are trauma-informed and accessible. The evaluation of the hub covered the start-up, launch, and first nine months of operation from January 2021 to September 2021.

Results of the evaluation validate that the hub is contributing to positive change, reducing barriers to needed services, and providing ongoing support to the target population. Based on the evaluation the client profile that accesses the integrated

Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy 2022 Update

services hub is female, between the ages of 12-24 years of age, is racialized and is or has been a victim, survivor or at risk of human sex trafficking. After accessing hub services clients reported:

- Improved knowledge of, and access to, availability of community resources;
- Increased feelings of hopefulness for the future;
- A significant reduction in feelings of being unsupported and isolated;
- Increased feelings of safety, including strategies for staying safe; and,
- An increase in mental and physical well-being and making progress on life goals.

Furthermore, seventy-one per cent of service providers surveyed stated that the Strategy has helped them to enhance trauma-informed service provision to clients. Additionally, seventy-five per cent stated that increased partnerships supported their organizations' work with human sex trafficking populations by reducing barriers to service access, allowing partner cross training, and enhancing service awareness. Within the first nine months 67 clients received intake, referrals, outreach, and case coordination at the integrated services hub.

c) Safe and Transition Houses

The Exits/Housing pillar is created to increase access to dedicated, safe, and supportive housing for victims and survivors through the development of a Safe House and a Transition House. The Safe House opened in 2020 however, opening of the Transition House was delayed to 2021 due to construction and supply chain issues brought on by the pandemic. Public health restrictions limited occupancy to both houses to fifty percent. Even with limited capacity, program data reported an average of ninety-three per cent occupancy rate between both houses. The Safe House supported 11 clients and the Transition House supported 6 clients. The average length of stay of the housing options ranged between 20 to 149 days. Once housed, individualized service plans are completed for each resident. The most common services and supports accessed by residents include mental wellness, life skills, housing, financial, physical health, safety planning, and network building. 52 service plans were completed for residents of the Safe House and 21 service plans were completed for residents of the Transition House.

Evaluation findings indicated that access to dedicated housing increased resources where organizations are equipped to provide appropriate housing and collaborative services in Peel. The evaluations also found that there is a strong connection between the Intervention and Exits/Housing pillars that best support referrals and access to available services and supports for victims, survivors, and those at-risk of sex trafficking.

3. Proposed Direction/Recommendation and Identified Need for a Permanent Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Program

As a result of COVID-19, women, and gender-diverse Ontarians have faced additional challenges such as increased economic insecurity and a rise in the incidence of domestic violence and human trafficking¹. Consequently, the pandemic further amplified the need for increased access to services and housing for human sex trafficking survivors in Peel.

¹ Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services. URL: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001454/ontario-strengthening-rural-services-for-survivors-of-violence-and-exploitation>

Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy 2022 Update

The Strategy ensures that specialized supports are now available within Peel enabling this population to access much-needed services and supports without having to leave their community. Results from the evaluations substantiate that the Strategy does increase availability and speed of service provision as coordinated services enable organizations to intervene faster, provide services more efficiently and be more responsive to the needs of individuals requiring support.

Based on the achieved outcomes of the Strategy, Regional staff recommend a permanent Anti-Human Sex Trafficking program in the Region of Peel. This will ensure the long-term sustainability of needed services and supports for those impacted by human sex trafficking. Given the adverse impact that COVID-19 has on service delivery, coupled with the rise in incidents of human sex trafficking, a permanent program in Peel during the restorative phases of the pandemic and ongoing is critical.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

As of March 2025, the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services funding of approximately \$730,000 annually for the integrated services hub may cease, impacting the long-term sustainability of the hub and the intervention pillar of the Strategy. Additionally, this program is funded with \$600,000 annually from Regional Reserves which will be phased out through future budget years.

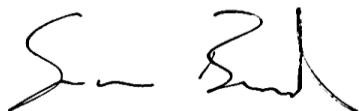
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Currently, the Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy's total budget in 2022 is \$2,188,731 consisting of \$1,384,274 for housing operations (one safe/emergency house and one transitional house) and \$804,457 for the integrated services hub including the salary and benefit of one full time position.

The 2022 Regional portion of funding for this program is \$858,454 as there is \$730,277 in provincial funding and a \$600,000 draw from regional reserves that is planned to be phased out by 2026. The net budget for the program is not expected to result in a net increase for the 2023 Budget.

If the provincial funding does not extend beyond March 2025, there will be further budget implications which will be addressed in the future budget years.

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