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**REPORT TITLE: Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action**

**FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Region of Peel advocate to the federal and provincial governments to implement the necessary legislative and policy changes to eliminate external violence against paramedics;**

**And further, that the Regional Chair write a letter to the federal Minister of Justice, on behalf of Regional Council, to request amendments to the Criminal Code that provide protections for paramedics;**

**And further, that a copy of the report from the Commissioner of Health, titled “Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action”, be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario, Solicitor General, Minister of Health, Peel-area MPs and MPPs, as well as Ontario’s single and upper-tier municipalities responsible for land ambulance, for endorsement and advocacy support.**

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Paramedic Services is advancing a multi-pronged approach to create awareness and support system-level changes that can reduce external violence against paramedics.
- This approach includes collaborating with local partners, improving incidence reporting, addressing an organizational culture that normalizes violence as “part of the job” and a public awareness campaign.
- With Council support, Paramedic Services is advocating for legislative and policy changes to reduce external violence against paramedics. The primary focus for this advocacy will be amendments to the Criminal Code that would strengthen protections for paramedics who are subject to external violence.

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background**

The report titled “Violence Prevention in Paramedic Services”, presented at the November 14, 2019 Regional Council meeting reported on Paramedic Services progress in implementing the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Group’s Psychological Health and Safety Standard (Standard). This national Standard addresses workplace risk factors that impact mental health including critical incident response management, suicide awareness and prevention, providing mental health and wellness resources and prevention of violence

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in the workplace. The report to Council specifically discussed work being done to address external violence against paramedics.

At that meeting, Council endorsed staff's recommendation for a public awareness campaign to advance efforts to address the organizational culture that normalizes external workplace violence. In addition, staff were directed to improve the method for reporting incidents of threats, intimidation, sexual harassment and physical and sexual assaults experienced by paramedics, and report on results of the staff collaboration and impact of the Psychological Health and Safety Program. As a final measure, Council also directed staff to pursue advocacy for legislative and policy changes addressing external violence against paramedics. (Council Resolution 2019-1043)

The COVID-19 pandemic and added pressures on individuals and communities has increased the potential for violence directed at paramedics in their interactions with the public. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic additional measures have been implemented to support Paramedic Services' staff during these extraordinary times. Examples of measures to date include peer support teams, the Quarantine Support Unit, and regular webinars for paramedics to engage directly with leadership. Paramedic Services is also developing a COVID-19 mental health strategy.

### **2. Progress on Public Awareness and Prevention Strategy**

Paramedics Services has worked internally and at the local level to implement practical measures to reduce violence against paramedics and plans to support these actions through raising public awareness to this violence. Paramedic Services is leveraging all available internal and Regional supports to advance a multi-pronged approach to create awareness on the issue of external violence against paramedics and to support system level changes.

#### **a) Addressing a Culture that Normalizes External Workplace Violence**

Staff have developed a Violence Position Statement and External Workplace Violence policy to inform paramedics and the public that the service is taking a zero-tolerance approach towards violence against staff. Appendix I provides a copy of the Violence Position Statement. Appendix II provides a copy of the External Violence Policy.

The policy helps manage the risk of physical and psychological harm that may occur when paramedics are subjected to violence from the public. The policy will be rolled-out across Paramedic Services in a way that allows employees to ask questions and to engage in discussion.

#### **b) Local Collaboration**

Paramedic Services is working with Peel Regional Police and the Ministry of Health operated Mississauga Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) to support a structured, collaborative approach to problem-solving operational issues and ongoing assessment of the status of violence prevention efforts.

Priorities for this collaboration include action plans to raise awareness of operational issues that impact paramedic safety, training for paramedics in situational awareness and de-escalation, improving emergent response communications between police and

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paramedics, and an improved system for flagging those addresses identified for heightened risk.

### **c) Public Awareness Campaign**

The public awareness campaign will aim to change the public perception that violence is a normal part of a paramedic's job and will underscore that violence against paramedics is unacceptable. The communication strategy will include the use of social media, digital advertising, as well as posters, and signage in ambulances (already in place), Region of Peel mobile signs, outreach to community groups. In addition, registered letters from Paramedic Services may be sent to individuals who have harassed paramedics while on the job. Appendix III provides a copy of signage in Peel Paramedics' ambulances.

### **d) Incident Reporting**

Paramedic Services and Human Resources staff continue to improve the process for paramedics to report violent incidents. A staff assessment of the process to report workplace incidents of violence and harassment has been completed and has identified several opportunities for improvement. Almost complete, Peel's new reporting processes will be among the first in Canada and will leverage existing reporting tools that enable paramedics to easily report incidents of violence, allowing for ongoing monitoring and tracking, and possible mitigation of violence in the future.

Over the past months the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed new service and community pressures on paramedics, underscoring the urgency for Paramedic Services to move ahead with all of the above measures.

## **3. Advocacy for Legislative and Policy Changes**

Further to direction from the November 14, 2019 meeting of Regional Council (Resolution 2019-1043), Paramedic Services sees opportunities for the Region to advocate federally and provincially for legislative and policy changes that can reduce external violence against paramedics. Regional advocacy will focus on the following two areas.

### **a) Criminal Code Amendments**

While advocacy is in early stages, Regional staff will focus on enforcement measures through amendments to the Criminal Code so that violence against on-duty paramedics is treated as an indictable criminal offence, consistent with sentencing for acts of violence against peace officers. This approach has been supported by national paramedic leadership and in a recent bill.

Staff has already reached out to a member of Parliament regarding Bill C-211 that proposes such amendments to the Criminal Code. The Bill underscores the physical and psychological impact of these assaults, and that health professionals including paramedics "deserve to feel protected and valued by the justice system". With Council support Regional staff will continue to identify opportunities to leverage existing advocacy and to engage sector partners and both the federal and provincial governments on the importance of amendments to the Criminal Code.

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### b) Sector-Wide Reporting and Training

An assessment of current local, provincial and federal policy raises additional opportunities to engage the provincial government and paramedic services provincially to advance the following:

1. Standardize sector-wide organizational practices and processes for reporting violence, and share these practices with other paramedic services in order to increase consistency and compliance with reporting of violence against paramedics; and,
2. Ensure paramedics are provided with supportive tools and training that may mitigate external violence, so that paramedics have stronger means to prevent violence in their work environment (e.g. standardized and consistent curriculum and on-the-job violence prevention training to ensure supports for paramedics across the workforce).

These advocacy opportunities will all leverage partnerships with Members of Parliament, municipal and paramedic services leadership at the federal and provincial levels (e.g. Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Association of Municipalities Ontario, Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs) and paramedic organizations.

With the support of Regional Council and the Government Relations Committee, Paramedic Services will continue with internal and external approaches to improve working conditions for paramedics.

## APPENDICES

- Appendix I - Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – Violence Position Statement
  - Appendix II - Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics - External Violence Policy
  - Appendix III - Peel Paramedics Ambulance Signage
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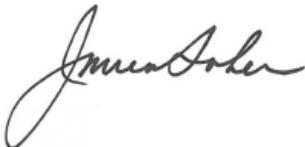
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### ***Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:***

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



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J. Baker, Chief Administrative Officer