

June 11, 2020

Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Honourable Christine Elliott
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto ON M7A 2J3

Honourable Merrilee Fullerton
Minister of Long-Term Care
6th Floor, 400 University Avenue
Toronto ON M5G 1S5

Dear Premier Ford, Minister Elliott, and Minister Fullerton:

At its meeting of June 1, 2020, Chatham-Kent Municipal Council unanimously supported a request from Councillor Clare Latimer to submit a letter to the Premier, Minister of Health, and Minister of Long-Term Care (LTC) regarding current and long-standing issues being faced by the LTC sector and to support the government's Commission on Long-Term Care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the human resources crisis that LTC has faced for a number of years. It has also brought homes and the residents who place trust in the system they will be well cared for into the limelight, when all along the number one priority of all levels of government and oversight should be the health, safety, and well-being of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

The LTC and Retirement Home (RH) sectors are chronically understaffed; losing the extra hands of visitors and volunteers during the pandemic, while necessary, has created an additional burden. Homes in Ontario are experiencing increasing difficulty recruiting and retaining Personal Support Workers (PSW), Registered Practical Nurses (RPN) and Registered Nurses (RN), creating long delays in the ability to fill vacant positions. Before the pandemic, many homes were indicating they no longer have a 'pool' of PSWs ready and available to fill vacant shifts. Homes are seeing more PSWs experiencing stress-related illnesses, mental and physical exhaustion, and an increase in work-related injuries. In addition to an already limited available workforce, hospitals are now hiring PSWs to fill support roles, and many RNs or RPNs accept positions in LTC only to resign when an acute care or community health position becomes available. Additional stressors directly related to the pandemic have certainly added to the staffing crisis. The provision of pandemic pay to front-line staff has helped, and while it would be a welcomed addition to the funding envelope moving forward, wage increases alone will not solve the chronic lack of people choosing long-term care as a career.

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Staffing ratios have been discussed for several years and there has been lobbying from many avenues to increase the number of direct nursing care hours for residents up to four hours of care per day in order to safely meet the complex needs of the current long-term care population. Without an influx of provincial dollars, coupled with a provincial LTC human resources strategy, homes will not be able to increase direct patient care hours; there simply are not enough human resources to go around. This is difficult for staff in long-term care and retirement homes. They are a determined, passionate bunch who want nothing more than to provide quality care to their residents who call their facilities home.

As a Municipal Council, we have watched the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on LTC and RHs across our province. Our municipality has not had any COVID-19 outbreaks in homes in Chatham-Kent; however, we are certainly aware of the ongoing risk and continue to do everything we can to ensure our residents and staff are safe and they have the tools and resources to manage during such a difficult time. As a Council, we support the government's LTC Commission and ask that it remain non-partisan, and be independent of owners and operators including ourselves as the owner and operator of Chatham-Kent's largest LTC home. While we are supportive of the Commission, we are asking for an impartial review of current best practices in both private and publicly operated homes. We are also requesting that the Commission be tasked with recommending best practice standards of care, and accountability protocols regarding documentation, peer reviews, and resident/family reviews.

We appreciate the work involved in any type of large-scale review with the hope the Commission is able to review the current impact of the pandemic and merge these findings with what the sector has known and has been advocating for over the last several years including staffing, governance models, physical structures of homes, and LTC regulations. A comprehensive look at past, current, and future insights will move the sector towards action and real change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Canniff', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Darrin Canniff, Mayor/CEO
Municipality of Chatham-Kent

C Rick Nicholls, MPP Chatham-Kent-Leamington
Monte McNaughton, MPP Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
All municipalities in Ontario