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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Memorandum CSS-M02-2023 Intimate Partner Violence in Haldimand County For Consideration by Council in Committee on September 19, 2023

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**To:** Mayor Bentley and Members of Council

**From:** Megan Jamieson, CHRL, General Manager of Corporate & Social Services

At the June 26, 2023 Haldimand County Council meeting, Council was provided a copy of a letter from the Township of Clearwater, to the Premier of Ontario and all municipalities within Ontario, dated May 31, 2023 RE: Declaring Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic (Attachment 1). Members of Council can ask for any item of information to be included in an upcoming CIC agenda for discussion; Mayor Bentley asked for this item to be brought forward, together with some local statistics.

### Background

Last summer, a landmark inquest into the 2015 deaths of Nathalie Warmerdam, Carol Culleton and Anastasia Kuzyk in Renfrew County was held. The inquest resulted in 86 recommendations with the intention of preventing similar tragedies by addressing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) before it escalates. The Province of Ontario has responded to some, but not all of those recommendations. Notably, the Province rejected the recommendation to declare IPV as an epidemic, suggesting epidemics are limited to infectious or communicable diseases.

Since this time, a growing list of at least 30 municipalities, including Ottawa, Toronto, Peel, Halton, Hamilton, Burlington, Kitchener, London and most of Windsor-Essex have passed resolutions declaring Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Domestic Violence (DV) and/or Gender Based Violence (GBV) an epidemic in their respective communities, prompting urgent action.

On August 19, 2023, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Board of Directors acknowledged GBV and IPV as an epidemic in Ontario, and coordinated an AMO delegation, highlighting the need for partnership with municipalities and community-based organizations to urgently address these issues.

### General Statistics

4 in 10 women in Canada have experienced IPV in their lifetime. 2021 represented the seventh, consecutive year of gradual increase in police-reported IPV in Canada.

Between September 22, 2015 and September 30, 2022, 127 *confirmed* Intimate partner femicides have occurred across Ontario.

Rural women face unique gaps in service (such as transportation and access to shelters) that makes them more vulnerable to violence. It was reported that women living in rural areas experience intimate partner violence at a 75% higher rate than those living in urban areas.

### Haldimand Statistics

From January 1 to July 11, 2023, Haldimand County OPP received 286 calls for service related to IPV (domestics). This compares to 512 calls in 2022. By contrast, Hamilton Police Services received 12,514 domestic violence or intimate partner violence calls in 2022.

Since February of 2023, the Haldimand County Police Services Board (PSB) has been presented with monthly IPV response details such as the total number of charges laid. For example, statistics from the

most recent PSB meeting (June) noted 8 of the 29 calls in May, 2023 resulted in charges, all of which were one party charges. The other 21 were categorized as “no offense alleged”.

Haldimand & Norfolk Women’s Services (HNWS) is the main service provider, supporting women in Haldimand County. Although statistics in their 2022-2023 annual report cover both Counties, it is estimated that approximately 40% relate to Haldimand residents. Notably, between April 1, 2022 and March 31, 2023, HNWS received 776 crisis calls, 772 counselling calls and provided community based support to 552 families/youth/survivors and a safe place to stay for 69 women and their children (94% occupancy in a 12 bed residence). A total of 420 women were referred out due to capacity limitations. Hamilton, being our closest urban neighbour reported housing 878 women, some with children, in 2022 with 4498 women being turned away from shelters due to limited capacity.

This compares to the 2022 HNWS annual report which noted 632 crisis calls, 1130 counselling calls, 611 community based support, 92% shelter occupancy and 277 women being referred out due to capacity limitations.

### Declaring an Epidemic

An epidemic is defined as an unexpected increase in the number of cases in a specific geographic area, where rates are above the expected occurrence.

Declaring an epidemic is predominantly done as a symbolic move – to increase awareness and to influence policy level changes. The public acknowledgement brings what’s been previously seen as a private matter in to the public and demands attention. Once declared, an epidemic does not cease until actionable items are met and improvement is demonstrated.

A risk in declaring IPV / GBV as an epidemic is the expectation for immediate change. Locally, significant and immediate change is unlikely, unless additional funding or resources are allocated as well. There are a number of important and escalating social issues and simply not enough resources to support the housing needs, mental health supports, addictions supports, etc. A declaration in and of itself would not necessarily change the established work plan of the Health and Social Services department, nor our community partners. It could help with related grant applications, provincial lobbying efforts and bringing weight to the severity of the issue across Ontario which, in the long run could affect funding and targeted goals.

It is important to note that on August 29, 2023, AMO president sent a letter to Ministers Michael Kerzner (Solicitor General), Michael Parsa (Children, Community and Social Services), and Charmaine Williams (Women’s Social and Economic Opportunity), calling for a concrete plan of action to address IPV, GBV, and violence against Indigenous women that is accompanied by sufficient resources, clear accountability mechanisms, and a robust implementation approach. AMO’s Social policy task force and policing task force will lead ongoing work to address these forms of violence. Such efforts, if successful will undoubtedly impact municipalities and community partners regardless if an epidemic is declared.

### Other Actions

Should Council wish to take alternative, or complementary, actions to respond to the identified issues of IPV / GBV in Haldimand County, there are a number of options to do so. Some examples:

- Bring forth recommendations to the Haldimand County Police Services Board to put a focused attention to IPV statistics and follow-up to encourage effective response to these issues.
- Bring forth recommendations to the Health & Social Services (H&SS) Advisory committee to integrate GBV, with specific mentions of both IPV and femicide into the H&N Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.
- Bring forth recommendations to the H&SS Advisory committee to support and consider funding to train public facing support positions within the H&SS team (where overlap in services may exist).

- Commit to working with Haldimand & Norfolk Justice for Women Review team and Haldimand & Norfolk Women's Services to ensuring GBV awareness training is available to all Haldimand County employees.
- Direct staff to identify and pursue County service areas that can partner to promote community based training and awareness programs.
- Acknowledge and support of the work AMO's social policy task force and policing task force, by way of a letter from the Mayor acknowledging their lead and ongoing work to address these forms of violence.

Actively engage with the Province of Ontario and highlight this as an issue requiring attention, by way of a letter from the Mayor, to advocate for sustainable investments that meaningfully address IPV and GBV.

This memo has been provided for information purposes, and no action is required at this time. However, should Council wish to take action they may either:

- Consider a motion based on the wording of other municipal motions, declaring intimate partner violence as an epidemic in Haldimand County; or
- Consider a motion recognizing the issues of gender-based violence as a serious issue in Haldimand County, and directing staff to pursue all of actions noted above; or
- Direct staff to pursue one or several of the actions noted above.

## **REFERENCES:**

None.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Township of Clearwater Letter - Declaring Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic
2. Haldimand & Norfolk Women's Services 2022-2023 Annual Report