*How to use this template: Fill in the yellow highlighted sections with your own information; delete any leftover highlighted sections and instructions; try and keep to 2 pages or less; send to your MPP!*

If you don’t know your MPP, [find it here (click the link](https://www.ola.org/en/members) and scroll down to Find my MPP)

Insert name of MPP

Insert their address/email address

Date

**RE: Ontario sexual assault centre funding and sexual violence survivors in our community**

Dear [name of MPP],

Our organization, [name of your organization/group] is writing with the needs of sexual violence survivors in mind. In [your region/town], survivors of sexual violence are reaching out for help more than ever. Our local community-based sexual assault centre is seeing significant service demands—and it has for some time. We are getting in touch to ask if you can help.

[Your organization/group] has a longstanding relationship with the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region (SASC); they provide wrap-around supports for local survivors of sexual violence including counselling, advocacy, fulfillment of practical needs (food, transportation), and accompaniment to the hospital, police station and court house.

[Name of your organization/group] often works with SASC: we refer those who have experienced sexual violence to them, sit with their staff and volunteers on various community committees, and have worked together on projects that assist survivors of violence and create social change in our community. SASC is a lifeline to survivors of violence in our community. If you have a brief non-identifying testimonial to share, insert it here: i.e. *Clients we refer to them speak positively about the support they have received; A youth who attended the Centre’s coping skills group shared that this service has changed their life*. If not, just delete this sentence].

In recent years, SASC has seen an influx of new referrals, crisis line calls and intake for counselling services; in 2021, crisis calls and online support chat requests increased by 32 per cent, and new requests for counselling increased by 58 per cent. The pandemic has worsened existing social and economic vulnerabilities, having an impact on survivors of violence in Waterloo Region. The economic fallout from business closures, job loss and more has increased the risk of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse[[1]](#footnote-1). Racialized communities, impoverished families, trans and gender non-binary people and others that have traditionally been marginalized have less access to resources[[2]](#footnote-2). Our organization sees these realities in support-seeker food insecurity, experiences of violence, and increasingly complex needs. If relevant, insert a sentence about other pandemic-related client/survivor needs you are seeing locally, i.e.: *As you know, in our region, there is very limited affordable housing*.

SASC is an essential service in our community. Many survivors do not engage the criminal justice system[[3]](#footnote-3)—but whether they report or not, they can still access support at SASC. During the pandemic, support for survivors of sexual violence at SASC has continued. We are shocked that they are providing services yet with the same limited resources with which they have operated for years. In its 2021 budget, Ontario allocated some investments to improve victim services and new sexual assault services in underserved Ontario locations. But none of these dollars will reach existing sexual assault centres like SASC. Ontario has also increased resources for mental health support, in light of the pandemic’s impacts: none of these dollars will enhance services at sexual assault centres either. We ask, why not? Many impacts of sexual violence align with common mental health issues[[4]](#footnote-4): research shows that up to 82% of victims experienced fear or anxiety, some experienced depression, and up to 44% experienced suicidal ideation[[5]](#footnote-5) after sexual violence.

Most Ontario sexual assault centres have has been operating in Ontario since the 1990s. The number of people accessing crisis support and long term counselling has multiplied ‒ in some regions by up to 4 times[[6]](#footnote-6) ‒ yet funding has simply not kept pace.

More survivors in our community could be getting support by now. A planned approximate 30% increase to the sexual violence sector was announced in 2018, but then was cut by the current provincial government. This increase would have addressed significant service pressures following a number of high-profile sexual violence cases in Ontario. The 2018 announcement would have meant greater capacity to help more people reaching community-based sexual assault centres: in our community, SASC could have used this increased funding to hire two additional fulltime counsellors and a family court support worker. At that time, the government ‒ and sexual violence support service providers alike – lauded the plan, which aimed to help survivors of sexual violence “get the support they need, when they need it”. Despite this, under Ontario’s current government, this [funding increase never became reality](https://www.tvo.org/article/why-rape-crisis-centres-need-funding-now-more-than-ever).

Other arms of government have recognized the need for a better-resourced violence response. In December, for example, the Town of Bracebridge passed a resolution recognizing the need for increased community-based sexual assault centre funding, and encouraging the province to provide increased and sustainable funding for sexual assault services[[7]](#footnote-7).

We write now to ask if you will make an effort to make funding that meets the needs of survivors at centres like SASC a reality:

As our MPP, ask the Ontario government to reinstate the funding increase that was cut in 2018 (an approximate 30% increase to community-based sexual assault centres in Ontario)

As our MPP, point out that current allocations to respond to local survivors are simply not meeting the existing service demands

As our MPP, agree that no survivor of violence should face a wait for services or to meet with a counsellor (currently, many do).

We look forward to hearing from you on what you think you can do to address this issue. My contact information is below. Sincerely,

Contact person’s name and role

Your organization/group

Organization/group’s address (MPPs are more likely to respond to their local constituents; if you include an address, they will know you work locally)

Email address/Phone number

1. Global Protection Cluster GBV Protection and Response and Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Last updated: 6 April 2020. *Identifying & Mitigating Gender-based Violence Risks within the COVID-19 Response.* Online: <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Interagency-GBV-risk-mitigation-and-Covid-tipsheet.pdf>: 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tasker, J.P. for CBC News. March 10, 2021. *More racially diverse areas reported much higher numbers of COVID-19 deaths: StatsCan: Black Canadians in particular have been far more likely to succumb to the virus than others*. Online: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/racial-minorities-covid-19-hard-hit-1.5943878> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. #  According to Canadian research, just 33 out of every 1,000 sexual assault cases are reported to the police, and just 29 are actually recorded as a crime See: Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: <http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html>

 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Learning Network on Violence Against Women. *Overcoming Barriers and Enhancing Supportive Responses: The Research on Sexual Violence Against Women - A Resource Document.* May 2012: 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Learning Network on Violence Against Women. *Overcoming Barriers and Enhancing Supportive Responses: The Research on Sexual Violence Against Women - A Resource Document.* May 2012: 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Provided by Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services in December 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hartill, Mary Beth, for The Bracebridge Examiner/Toronto Star. January 7, 2022. *Say it in numbers: Bracebridge council backing victims of sexual assault A look at the numbers behind sexual assault services in Parry Sound-Muskoka.* Online: <https://www.thestar.com/local-bracebridge/news/council/2022/01/07/say-it-in-numbers-bracebridge-council-backing-victims-of-sexual-assault.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)