



Jim Watson
Mayor / Maire

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August 16, 2022

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1
doug.fordco@pc.ola.org

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
5775 Yonge Street - 16th Floor
Toronto Ontario M7A 2E5
Sylvia.Jones@pc.ola.org

By e-mail

RE: Paramedic Offload Delays in Ottawa Hospitals

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Jones,

As you know, communities and residents across the province are facing serious health and safety issues as municipalities continue to struggle with a severe shortage of paramedic availability caused by long ambulance offload times at hospitals. I am writing today to seek your leadership to reduce these increasingly frequent delays and “Level Zero” situations.

Hospital offload delays are a significant contributor to incidences of “Level Zero” (when there are no paramedic units available for patient conveyance). Hospital offload delays impact Ottawa Paramedic Service’s ability to respond to calls and return to service quickly, and they jeopardize public safety. The trickledown effect of surrounding regional municipalities faced with similar offload delays further exacerbate “Level Zero” incidences locally.

With your leadership, and by prioritizing efficient taxpayer spending, the province can resolve this long-standing issue once and for all by recognizing offload delays as a

public safety risk. The province and municipalities pay for paramedics to be assisting residents needing urgent medical attention. They do not pay, nor do they want, paramedics to perform hallway medicine in hospital emergency rooms.

The province needs to send a strong message to hospitals that offload delays are not acceptable and encourage them to be open to innovative solutions by working collaboratively with all parties involved. With your direction, incentives can be implemented for hospitals to meet the 30-minute offload target and create standardized measurement and reporting between hospitals and paramedics, so we have more consistent and accurate data collection to inform decisions.

Last week I met again with staff and the leadership of the local hospitals to brainstorm and discuss urgent action needed from all parties. We are currently experiencing a 20 per cent increase in response volume and over 1,125 incidents of “Level Zero” to date in 2022. Our local hospitals recognize that they must develop a culture that prioritizes getting paramedics back on the road as quickly as possible. They are working to triage patients brought in by paramedics and to take a whole-hospital approach, including escalation plans that mobilize all levels of the hospital when there are emergency department surges and risks of offload delays.

Hospitals recognize the offload issue, but point to long-standing institutional challenges, such as the need for additional ‘alternate level of care” (ALC) beds, to free up space in emergency departments. Such challenges will take time to solve. In the meantime, we are seeking your help to move this issue forward on an urgent basis.

We are therefore requesting funding for 42 additional paramedics to address current shortages and ensure public safety moving forward. If funded, we have agreed with local hospitals that these new paramedics could be strategically allocated to the four area hospitals and care for lower acuity patients waiting in the emergency department. This would allow for more paramedics to return an ambulance back into service faster.

I have the hospital sector’s full commitment to the proposed approach. I have attached a recent letter I received with additional information and a clear commitment to this strategy.

I would be happy to discuss this further with you and provide any additional information required. I would also like to reiterate my appreciation for your engagement and assistance on this important issue and for your ongoing commitment to the residents of Ottawa. I would also like to take this opportunity to personally thank you for your open and ongoing discussions with me over the last number of years on this issue and others that directly impact our community’s health and safety. Specifically, we are pleased with the Ottawa Paramedic Service Community Paramedic Program, Mental Wellbeing Response Team, and Palliative Care Program, which are three great examples of initiatives that demonstrate innovative community engagement and service and the province’s willingness to pursue innovative approaches to health care.

Should you have any questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Watson", with a horizontal line underneath.

Jim Watson
Mayor
City of Ottawa

cc: The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
(minister.mah@ontario.ca)
The Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Long-term Care
The Honourable Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Lisa MacLeod, Member of Provincial Parliament, Nepean



2022 August 10

His Worship, Mayor Jim Watson
City of Ottawa
110 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa ON K1P 1J1

Dear Mr. Mayor,

RE: Solving Paramedic Offload Delays in Ottawa Hospitals

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance in solving the longstanding paramedic offload delay issue in Ottawa hospitals.

As a result of the ongoing systemwide health care crisis, the Ottawa Paramedic Service (OPS) and area hospitals, along with other paramedic services across Ontario and Canada, continue to experience unprecedented service impacts.

Since April 2022, the OPS has experienced a 20 per cent increase in response volume. For its part, Ottawa City Council has continued to make significant investments in the OPS to address increased service demand and to meet response time standards. Already this year, the OPS has hired 28 new staff to increase the Service's capacity to meet the demand for service.

Despite these investments, the OPS is unable to improve service delivery as paramedics are stuck in emergency departments due to offload delay, which leads to no ambulances being available (noted as a *level zero* event).

Over the years, the OPS and area hospitals have implemented several initiatives to proactively relieve pressure on the broader healthcare system. This includes providing patients with safe, alternate care options that help reduce patient transports to emergency departments, tiering other first responder agencies where appropriate and helping to balance the distribution of patients across area hospitals.

Despite these efforts, in 2021, Ottawa paramedics spent more than 49,000 hours in offload delay, resulting in 750 incidents of "level zero" (when there are no ambulances

available to transport a patient), creating a significant risk to public safety. The 90th percentile hospital offload delay was 97 minutes, far exceeding the 30-minute benchmark. Further, in the first seven months of 2022, the Ottawa Paramedic Service experienced more than 1125 instances of level zero.

For a variety of reasons, hospitals have not been able to receive patients within the 30-minute benchmark, despite investments in the Dedicated Offload Nurse Program, among other initiatives. The increasing number of alternate level of care (ALC) patients occupying a bed in a hospital, staffing shortages in nursing and emergency department closures have increased the frequency and duration of no ambulances being available. In some cases, Ottawa has had 11 hours of continuous level zero and low acuity patients waiting more than seven hours before being transported to the hospital. Our residents expect that an ambulance will be available in their time of need. Offload delay is a persistent and worsening issue requiring immediate action.

We therefore would appreciate your leadership in seeking \$5 million in base funding to hire 42 paramedics. These new paramedics would be strategically allocated to the four area hospitals and care for up to four lower acuity patients (per paramedic, CTAS 2-5) at a time, while waiting in the emergency department. This would enable paramedics to return an ambulance back into service.

Investing in this initiative would allow us to allocate up to four paramedics 24/7 at each area hospital. This will considerably reduce the instances of level zero, reduce response times for the highest acuity calls, and ensure patients receive emergency care and are monitored while awaiting care in hospital, thereby reducing the strain on the emergency department. However, broader strategies will require further development to reduce wait times in the hospital.

This permanent base funding request further aligns with a memorandum we received from Christine Elliott, Minister of Health on 2022 February 16, requesting that Ottawa paramedics begin to “batch” patients.

We request that 100% of the funding be provided to the OPS to hire 42 new paramedics described above, as well as an additional \$750,000 to purchase the corresponding equipment (e.g., defibrillator/monitors, stretchers, etc.).

We appreciate your consideration of this request to help us secure the investment necessary to enable paramedics to fulfill their critical role in providing emergency medical care in the community.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

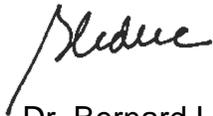
Sincerely,



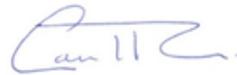
Pierre Poirier, MBA, BA, ACP
Chief, Ottawa Paramedic Service



Dr. Andrew Falconer
President and CEO, Queensway Carleton
Hospital



Dr. Bernard Leduc, M.D., MBA
Président-directeur général
L'Hôpital Montfort



Cameron Love, MHA
President and CEO, The Ottawa Hospital

Cc: Steve Kanellakos, City Manager, City of Ottawa
Kim Ayotte, General Manager, Emergency and Protective Services