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October 17th, 2024.

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Government of Ontario
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Hon. Andrea Khanjin
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Government of Ontario
minister.mecp@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Jones and Minister Khanjin,

Re: Continued Support for Infectious Disease Wastewater Surveillance

Public health units across Ontario, including Peterborough Public Health and Renfrew County and District Health Unit, have already voiced their concern about the Province's decision to discontinue funding for the Infectious Disease Wastewater Surveillance Initiative. The Board of Health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (HKPR) District Health Unit shares this concern. Since its establishment in 2020, the Wastewater Surveillance Initiative (WSI) has been an invaluable public health tool, providing timely and cost-effective data on the prevalence of COVID-19 in our communities.

Wastewater-based surveillance has demonstrated its utility as one of the ways to strengthen public health surveillance and scientific infrastructure. The public health sector can use this comprehensive real-time information to inform the public health response. This also serves as a One Health Surveillance approach far beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been shown to be effective in monitoring a range of other infectious diseases, including Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), Polio, and Mpox, as well as playing a crucial role in pandemic preparedness. Locally, the HKPR District Health Unit had utilized wastewater data as part of its respiratory infection surveillance. The discontinuation of this program now leaves a gap in our ability to monitor community health effectively.

The termination of this program severely diminishes the infrastructure and capacity for future surveillance, which is vital for local health units and pandemic preparedness efforts across the province. The Board of Health strongly believes that wastewater surveillance is a useful component of Ontario's public health infrastructure. This program enables early detection of emerging and novel infectious disease threats and allows for a broader, more comprehensive view of community health without relying solely on clinical testing.

We urge the province to either reconsider its decision and reinstate funding to support wastewater-based surveillance provincially, or to collaborate with the Public Health Agency of Canada to implement an ongoing



provincial wastewater surveillance program that would include sites in all Public Health Unit regions. Either approach would allow for ongoing monitoring and early detection of pathogens and substances of public health concern.

Sincerely,

David Marshall
Chair, Board of Health
Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit

cc. Local MPPs



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