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**REPORT TITLE: Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action**

**FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Region of Peel advocate to the federal and provincial governments to implement the necessary legislative and policy changes to eliminate external violence against paramedics;**

**And further, that the Regional Chair write a letter to the federal Minister of Justice, on behalf of Regional Council, to request amendments to the Criminal Code that provide protections for paramedics;**

**And further, that a copy of the report from the Commissioner of Health, titled “Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action”, be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario, Solicitor General, Minister of Health, Peel-area MPs and MPPs, as well as Ontario’s single and upper-tier municipalities responsible for land ambulance, for endorsement and advocacy support.**

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Paramedic Services is advancing a multi-pronged approach to create awareness and support system-level changes that can reduce external violence against paramedics.
- This approach includes collaborating with local partners, improving incidence reporting, addressing an organizational culture that normalizes violence as “part of the job” and a public awareness campaign.
- With Council support, Paramedic Services is advocating for legislative and policy changes to reduce external violence against paramedics. The primary focus for this advocacy will be amendments to the Criminal Code that would strengthen protections for paramedics who are subject to external violence.

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background**

The report titled “Violence Prevention in Paramedic Services”, presented at the November 14, 2019 Regional Council meeting reported on Paramedic Services progress in implementing the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Group’s Psychological Health and Safety Standard (Standard). This national Standard addresses workplace risk factors that impact mental health including critical incident response management, suicide awareness and prevention, providing mental health and wellness resources and prevention of violence

## **Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action**

in the workplace. The report to Council specifically discussed work being done to address external violence against paramedics.

At that meeting, Council endorsed staff's recommendation for a public awareness campaign to advance efforts to address the organizational culture that normalizes external workplace violence. In addition, staff were directed to improve the method for reporting incidents of threats, intimidation, sexual harassment and physical and sexual assaults experienced by paramedics, and report on results of the staff collaboration and impact of the Psychological Health and Safety Program. As a final measure, Council also directed staff to pursue advocacy for legislative and policy changes addressing external violence against paramedics. (Council Resolution 2019-1043)

The COVID-19 pandemic and added pressures on individuals and communities has increased the potential for violence directed at paramedics in their interactions with the public. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic additional measures have been implemented to support Paramedic Services' staff during these extraordinary times. Examples of measures to date include peer support teams, the Quarantine Support Unit, and regular webinars for paramedics to engage directly with leadership. Paramedic Services is also developing a COVID-19 mental health strategy.

### **2. Progress on Public Awareness and Prevention Strategy**

Paramedics Services has worked internally and at the local level to implement practical measures to reduce violence against paramedics and plans to support these actions through raising public awareness to this violence. Paramedic Services is leveraging all available internal and Regional supports to advance a multi-pronged approach to create awareness on the issue of external violence against paramedics and to support system level changes.

#### **a) Addressing a Culture that Normalizes External Workplace Violence**

Staff have developed a Violence Position Statement and External Workplace Violence policy to inform paramedics and the public that the service is taking a zero-tolerance approach towards violence against staff. Appendix I provides a copy of the Violence Position Statement. Appendix II provides a copy of the External Violence Policy.

The policy helps manage the risk of physical and psychological harm that may occur when paramedics are subjected to violence from the public. The policy will be rolled-out across Paramedic Services in a way that allows employees to ask questions and to engage in discussion.

#### **b) Local Collaboration**

Paramedic Services is working with Peel Regional Police and the Ministry of Health operated Mississauga Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) to support a structured, collaborative approach to problem-solving operational issues and ongoing assessment of the status of violence prevention efforts.

Priorities for this collaboration include action plans to raise awareness of operational issues that impact paramedic safety, training for paramedics in situational awareness and de-escalation, improving emergent response communications between police and

## **Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action**

paramedics, and an improved system for flagging those addresses identified for heightened risk.

### **c) Public Awareness Campaign**

The public awareness campaign will aim to change the public perception that violence is a normal part of a paramedic's job and will underscore that violence against paramedics is unacceptable. The communication strategy will include the use of social media, digital advertising, as well as posters, and signage in ambulances (already in place), Region of Peel mobile signs, outreach to community groups. In addition, registered letters from Paramedic Services may be sent to individuals who have harassed paramedics while on the job. Appendix III provides a copy of signage in Peel Paramedics' ambulances.

### **d) Incident Reporting**

Paramedic Services and Human Resources staff continue to improve the process for paramedics to report violent incidents. A staff assessment of the process to report workplace incidents of violence and harassment has been completed and has identified several opportunities for improvement. Almost complete, Peel's new reporting processes will be among the first in Canada and will leverage existing reporting tools that enable paramedics to easily report incidents of violence, allowing for ongoing monitoring and tracking, and possible mitigation of violence in the future.

Over the past months the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed new service and community pressures on paramedics, underscoring the urgency for Paramedic Services to move ahead with all of the above measures.

## **3. Advocacy for Legislative and Policy Changes**

Further to direction from the November 14, 2019 meeting of Regional Council (Resolution 2019-1043), Paramedic Services sees opportunities for the Region to advocate federally and provincially for legislative and policy changes that can reduce external violence against paramedics. Regional advocacy will focus on the following two areas.

### **a) Criminal Code Amendments**

While advocacy is in early stages, Regional staff will focus on enforcement measures through amendments to the Criminal Code so that violence against on-duty paramedics is treated as an indictable criminal offence, consistent with sentencing for acts of violence against peace officers. This approach has been supported by national paramedic leadership and in a recent bill.

Staff has already reached out to a member of Parliament regarding Bill C-211 that proposes such amendments to the Criminal Code. The Bill underscores the physical and psychological impact of these assaults, and that health professionals including paramedics "deserve to feel protected and valued by the justice system". With Council support Regional staff will continue to identify opportunities to leverage existing advocacy and to engage sector partners and both the federal and provincial governments on the importance of amendments to the Criminal Code.

## Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action

### b) Sector-Wide Reporting and Training

An assessment of current local, provincial and federal policy raises additional opportunities to engage the provincial government and paramedic services provincially to advance the following:

1. Standardize sector-wide organizational practices and processes for reporting violence, and share these practices with other paramedic services in order to increase consistency and compliance with reporting of violence against paramedics; and,
2. Ensure paramedics are provided with supportive tools and training that may mitigate external violence, so that paramedics have stronger means to prevent violence in their work environment (e.g. standardized and consistent curriculum and on-the-job violence prevention training to ensure supports for paramedics across the workforce).

These advocacy opportunities will all leverage partnerships with Members of Parliament, municipal and paramedic services leadership at the federal and provincial levels (e.g. Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Association of Municipalities Ontario, Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs) and paramedic organizations.

With the support of Regional Council and the Government Relations Committee, Paramedic Services will continue with internal and external approaches to improve working conditions for paramedics.

## APPENDICES

- Appendix I - Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – Violence Position Statement
  - Appendix II - Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics - External Violence Policy
  - Appendix III - Peel Paramedics Ambulance Signage
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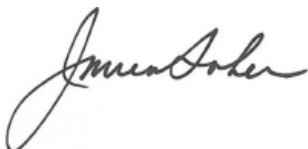
*For further information regarding this report, please contact Peter Dundas, Director and Chief, Ext. 3921, [peter.dundas@peelregion.ca](mailto:peter.dundas@peelregion.ca).*

*Authored By: Faith Bisram, Manager Culture and Engagement and Cullen Perry, Analyst Research and Policy.*

### ***Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:***

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



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J. Baker, Chief Administrative Officer



# Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public

*Paramedics should not tolerate violence while at work.* Peel Regional Paramedic Services has zero tolerance for our paramedics being subjected to violence from the public, and any incident of violence happening to one of our employees is unacceptable.

If you are a victim of violence:

- Contact police and exit the scene if you can
- Report the incident to your supervisor as soon as possible and let them know if you need them to attend the scene
- Ensure the incident is documented. Your supervisor will support you with this
- Document the address to be flagged if appropriate. This is crucial to keep you and your colleagues safer in the future
- Ask for support if you need it, even after the fact. Being subjected to violence can be emotionally impactful and the effects can be cumulative. You deserve care

What you can expect of your supervisor:

- When alerted of a violent incident and that their presence is required, supervisors will attend the scene, stand up for paramedics and set boundaries with perpetrators of violence
- If not already done so, supervisors will contact police and advocate for their timely arrival. If appropriate, they will also advocate for charges to be laid
- They will ensure that you receive emotional support and medical care if required
- They will support you in completing necessary documentation

As an employer we are committed to providing paramedics with a workplace that is safe, to preventing violence and to supporting paramedics following all violent incidents. **No one should ever be subjected to violence while at work.**

## PEEL REGIONAL PARAMEDIC SERVICES STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

<b>Section:</b>	HEALTH & SAFETY	<b>SOP No:</b>	HS – 19
		<b>Total pages:</b>	3
<b>Subject:</b>	ZERO TOLERANCE FOR VIOLENCE FROM THE PUBLIC	<b>Authority:</b>	Chief, Paramedic Services
<b>Date Revised:</b>		<b>Date Issued:</b>	JANUARY 2020

### A. POLICY STATEMENT

- Peel Regional Paramedic Services has zero tolerance for our paramedics being subjected to violence from the public. This supports the Value Statement from the Region of Peel: “We care and support everyone’s well being and success.”

### B. RISK STATEMENT

- This policy manages the risk of physical and psychological harm that may occur when paramedics are subjected to violence from the public while at work.

### C. RESPONSIBILITIES

Paramedics must:

- Be aware of the factors that may contribute to a paramedic being put at risk of violence from a member of the public. These include, but are not limited to:
  - The member of the public has a previous history of violence
  - The member of the public is exhibiting behaviours that could lead to violence, i.e. confusion, agitation, paranoia, intoxication, disruptive behaviour
  - The member of the public is being verbally assaultive and engaging in intimidating behaviour as these behaviours can very quickly escalate to physical assault.
- Remove themselves from the scene and retreat to a safe area if it is safe to do so. See: [HS-14: Scene Safety \(includes staging\)](#).
- Notify police
- Ask for support if needed, even after the fact.
- Report the incident to their supervisor as soon as possible.
- Ensure the incident is documented.

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- Document the address to be flagged if appropriate to ensure that themselves and other paramedics are kept safer in the future.

Superintendents must:

- When alerted that a paramedic has suffered a violent incident from the public, meet with paramedic if requested to do so.
- Set boundaries with perpetrators of violence.
- Contact police and advocate for their timely arrival if paramedic has not already done so.
- Ensure that paramedics receive emotional support and if required, medical aid.
- Support paramedics to complete necessary documentation.

### D. SOURCE DOCUMENTS

- [Homewood Health and EFAP resources](#)
  - 1-800-663-1142 (toll-free)
  - [homeweb.ca](http://homeweb.ca)

#### Related Policies:

- This policy should be interpreted as consistent with PRPS policies including but not limited to the following:
  - [HS-14: Scene Safety \(includes staging\)](#)
  - [HS-15: Critical Incident Stress](#)
  - [HS-16: Flagging of Addresses](#)
  - [OPS-06: Emotionally Disturbed and Aggressive Patients](#)
- **Relevant Regional Policies:**
  - [Respectful Workplace policy](#)

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- [Violence in the Workplace policy](#)
- [Employee Reporting Program policy](#)
- [Whistleblower Protection policy](#)

- **Relevant Legislation:**

- [The Criminal Code of Canada, section 264.1 \(1\). Assaults](#)
- [The Criminal Code of Canada, section 34.1. Self Defence](#)
- [BLS Standards, 2016. Pg. 48](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)

### E. DEFINITIONS

Peel Regional Paramedic Services describes violence using the following definitions:

- Verbal Assault – Abusive or hateful language, yelling, screaming with intent of offending or frightening paramedic
- Intimidation- Purposely threatening, following, using gestures to purposely offend or frighten paramedic
- Physical Assault- Physical attack, attempt to attack; punching, kicking, using a weapon with intent of causing bodily harm
- Sexual Harassment- Sexual propositioning or unwelcome sexual attention from a perpetrator. Humiliation or offensive jokes and remarks with sexual overtones, suggestive looks or physical gestures
- Sexual Assault- Indecent assault. Brushing, touching, or grabbing of genitals or breast area



PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN – POSTING IN AMBULANCES



**VERBAL** yelling  
swearing **ASSAULT**  
name-calling threatening  
criticizing performance  
**PHYSICAL** hitting  
spitting **ASSAULT**  
**GRABBING** kicking  
**SEXUAL** grabbing  
**HARASSMENT** brushing  
sexual comments  
Intimidating **RACISM**

# ZERO

## tolerance for **violence**

Violators will be reported  
to the **police**



**#ProtectParamedics**

**APPROVED AT REGIONAL COUNCIL  
November 12, 2020**

**19. ITEMS RELATED TO HEALTH**

**19.1 Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action**

**Resolution Number 2020-919**

**Moved by** Councillor Thompson

**Seconded by** Councillor Dasko

That the Region of Peel advocate to the federal and provincial governments to implement the necessary legislative and policy changes to eliminate external violence against paramedics;

And further, that the Regional Chair write a letter to the federal Minister of Justice, on behalf of Regional Council, to request amendments to the Criminal Code that provide protections for paramedics;

And further, that a copy of the report from the Commissioner of Health Services, titled “Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action”, be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario, Solicitor General, Minister of Health, Peel-area MPs and MPPs, as well as Ontario’s single and upper-tier municipalities responsible for land ambulance, for endorsement and advocacy support.

**Carried**

The Honourable David Lametti  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada  
[david.lametti@parl.gc.ca](mailto:david.lametti@parl.gc.ca)

December 4, 2020

Dear Minister Lametti,

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the vital importance of our frontline heroes in safeguarding public health and safety, including paramedics. However, I am writing to bring to your attention longstanding incidence of violence against paramedics perpetrated by patients and bystanders. Abuses include verbal abuse, harassment, threats, intimidation and physical assaults on a regular basis.

As with all Canadian workers, paramedics have the right to carry out their work duties free of harassment and violence.

To this end, Region of Peel Council passed the attached resolution, and accompanying report on November 12, 2020, entitled “Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action”, calling for amendments to the Criminal Code that provide protections for paramedics. Such amendments would ensure that acts and threats of violence against on-duty paramedics are treated as an indictable criminal offence, consistent with sentencing for acts of violence against peace officers.

The consequences of chronic exposure to workplace violence are significant, including long-term physical, psychological and emotional harm. Because the problem is so pervasive and is often perpetrated by people for whom criminal prosecution is unlikely, there is a perception of tacit institutional acceptance of violence as a normal, unpreventable part of paramedic work.

Operating one of the largest paramedic services in Ontario, the Region of Peel has taken a proactive approach in advancing prevention of paramedic violence. Regional Council is supportive of the following additional local measures:

- Collaboration between Human Resources and Paramedic Services to address the organizational culture that normalizes external workplace violence
- Improvements to the method of reporting all incidents of threats and intimidation, assault, sexual harassment experienced by Peel Paramedics

**Nando Iannicca**  
Regional Chair & CEO

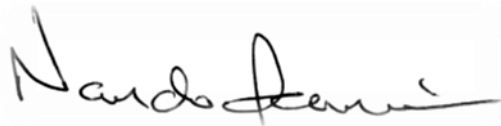
10 Peel Centre Dr.  
Suite A, 5th Floor  
Brampton, ON L6T 4B9  
905-791-7800 ext. 4310

- Ongoing progress implementing the Canadian Standards Association Group's Psychological Health and Safety Standard
- Working with Peel Regional Police and the Mississauga Central Ambulance Communication Centre to support a structured, collaborative approach to problem-solving operational issues and ongoing assessment of the status of violence prevention efforts
- A zero-tolerance public awareness campaign to address external violence against paramedics

Our vision for Peel is a *Community for Life* and paramedics, and the vital service they provide, play an important role in the realization of this plan. Efforts to support them are making a difference, but there is more work to do. Amendments to the Federal Criminal Code will help to protect our paramedics and will also convey the value that Canadians place on paramedics' health and safety.

We look forward to ongoing collaboration between our respective levels of government to ensure the continuation of this positive momentum to eliminate external violence against paramedics. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss with you and your office on how we can work together to implement the necessary changes to address this very important issue.

Kindest personal regards,



Nando Iannicca  
Regional Chair & Chief Executive Officer  
Region of Peel

CC: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Hon. Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General  
Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health  
Peel MPs and MPPs  
Single and upper-tier municipalities responsible for land ambulance

Attached: Resolution 2020-919  
Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action,  
November 12, 2020