Dear Minister Parsa,

Re: 2023 Review of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 (CYFSA)

On behalf of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aPHa) and its member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health, and Affiliate organizations, I am writing today to provide our feedback on the 2023 Review of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 (CYFSA), especially as it pertains to your Ministry’s responsibility for the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program that is delivered by our members.

Early childhood development is among the most critical determinants of health, with ample evidence having demonstrated that experiences, both positive and negative, have the greatest impact between birth through to the age of 6. Experiences during these years will have measurable effects on the social, economic and health outcomes throughout a person’s life, which in turn contribute to social, economic and health outcomes of society.

We have noted with interest that prevention and community-based services is one of the six key areas of focus for this legislative review, and that increasing access to prevention, early identification and early intervention services to better support healthy child development and family well-being has already been identified as a priority.

As you are aware, our members are responsible for the delivery of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program under the Ontario Public Health Standards, with funding provided by your Ministry. HBHC is a critically important program that represents the earliest possible opportunity to identify children who may be exposed to a host of social and economic risk factors that are known to have cumulative negative impacts on health and development throughout the lifespan. Despite its indisputable value, this program has seen significant erosion over nearly two decades of chronic underfunding.

Attached is our most recent resolution on early childhood development, which calls on the Province to support investments in early childhood development as a strategy to enable health and resiliency throughout life, promote mental health and reduce mental illness and addictions; and renews our ongoing call for adequate funding of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program.

This call fits squarely with the identified priorities of the current review of your governing legislation and we hope that you will take this into careful and serious consideration.
We look forward to discussing this with you further. To schedule a meeting, please have your staff contact Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, alPHA, at loretta@alphaweb.org or 647-325-9594.

COPY: Hon. Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
     Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
     CYFSA Project Lead, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Encl.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Charles Gardner
alPHA President
WHEREAS one in five Canadians are affected by mental illness or an addiction issue every year, and the burden of illness is more than 1.5 times the burden of all cancers and 7 times the burden of all infectious diseases; and

WHEREAS suicide is the second leading cause of mortality among young Canadians aged 10-24 and suicide accounted for 24% of all deaths among youth 15 to 24 years old from 2009-2013; and

WHEREAS there were more than 9,000 deaths in Canada from 2016 to 2018 and more than 1,250 deaths in Ontario in 2017 related to opioids; and

WHEREAS the annual economic burden of mental illness is approximately 51 billion in Canada with a substantial impact on emergency room departments and hospitals; and

WHEREAS 70% of mental health and substance use problems begin in childhood; and adverse childhood experiences, such as poor attachment to parents, child abuse, family conflict and neglect, have been clearly linked to risk for mental illness and addiction later in life; and

WHEREAS programming that enhances the early childhood experience has proven benefits in IQ levels, educational achievements, income levels, interactions with the criminal justice system and utilization of social services; and

WHEREAS every $1 invested in early childhood development can save $9 in future spending on health, social and justice services; and

WHEREAS the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program is a prevention/early intervention initiative designed to ensure that all Ontario families with children (prenatal to the child’s transition to school) who are at risk of physical, cognitive, communicative, and/or psychosocial problems have access to effective, consistent, early intervention services; and

WHEREAS the HBHC program provides home visiting services and home visiting programs have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing parenting skills and promoting healthy child development in ways that prevent child maltreatment; and
WHEREAS the HBHC program supports the early childhood experience and development of resiliency by enhancing the parent-child attachment, parenting style, family relationships, and financial instability and addressing parental mental illness and substance misuse, child abuse or neglect thereby reducing the risk of subsequent mental illness and addictions; and

WHEREAS in 1997 the province committed to funding the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program at 100% and the HBHC budget has been flat-lined since 2008 with the exception of increased base funding in 2012 for an increase in public health nursing positions for Healthy Babies Healthy Children program as part of the 9,000 Nurses Commitment; and

WHEREAS fixed costs such as salaries and benefits, travel, supplies, equipment and other operational costs have increased the costs of operating the HBHC program, and

WHEREAS operating the HBHC program with the existing funding has become increasingly more challenging and will result in reduced services for high-risk families if increased funding is not provided;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aLPHA) actively engage with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health and Long term Care, and the Premier’s Council on Improving Health Care and Ending Hallway Medicine to support investments in early childhood development as a strategy to enable health and resiliency throughout life, promote mental health and reduce mental illness and addictions;

AND FURTHER that aLPHA engage with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health and Long term Care, and the Premier’s Council on Improving Health Care and Ending Hallway Medicine to urgently support adequate funding (including staffing and operational costs) of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program as a strategic immediate action to enhance the early childhood experience and address mental illness and addictions in Ontario;

AND FURTHER that the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario, Ontario Public Health Association, Centre for Addictions and Mental Health and other relevant partner agencies be so advised.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE: Carried as amended