July 5, 2022

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister LeBlanc,

On June 23, 2022, the Niagara Region Board of Health endorsed a motion to urge that two measures be adopted to help protect Ontarians and Canadians from COVID-19 over the long-term:

1. Updating the Ontario Building Code as well as the National Building Code of Canada, and any other applicable building standards, to incorporate higher air quality standards such that respiratory diseases, especially COVID-19 and other emerging infections, can be sustainably prevented in all new buildings, with regular updates to these building codes as best available evidence evolves;

2. Furthermore, in order to ensure the benefits are available to existing buildings, our Region is asking for a fund to be established to support small businesses and local organizations to upgrade the ventilation and filtration in their existing buildings, as well as invest in validated air cleaning/disinfection technologies with demonstrated safety and effectiveness, so that current public spaces and workspaces can be made safer from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, including future pandemics of a respiratory virus.

The motion passed by our Board of Health is enclosed.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, air has been known to play a role in human health by facilitating the transmission of infectious agents such as the influenza virus or pollutants such as cigarette smoke. A range of negative health outcomes are possible depending on the agent, with outcomes ranging from infectious symptoms all the way to exacerbation of asthma in children and cancers. Research is clarifying the much greater role air plays in COVID-19 transmission but it is now clear that a properly performing air handling system represents a critical tool that can help reduce the risk of COVID-19 as summarized by Public Health...
Ontario\(^1\) and the Public Health Agency of Canada\(^2\). As discussed by the Centres of Disease Control and Prevention\(^3\), appropriate ventilation can help reduce the concentration of COVID-19 viral particles present and can be combined with other recommendations including using the highest efficiency filter appropriate and other emerging air cleaning/disinfection technologies.

Although the risk of infectious disease transmission can never be completely eliminated, adding another layer of protection will not only substantially protect those most vulnerable to serious outcomes but will also reduce the need for disruptive measures, such as lockdowns, to protect the health of Ontarians and Canadians. This will help society to remain open with the economy continuing to function as these automatic measures work continuously in the background, while also ensuring our society is more resilient to future respiratory infection pandemics.

As an additional benefit, Health Canada has identified numerous indoor air pollutants which can cause negative health effects typically seen on longer time scales due to chronic nature of low-level exposure. Improving indoor air quality can also have long-term benefits in preventing these diseases from occurring in the first place and by preventing the worsening of pre-existing conditions.

As any amendments to the Ontario Building Code will not apply retroactively, it is important to establish a means to support existing businesses and organizations to make any necessary changes. This will not only help to protect the health of the public immediately but also ensure these benefits are distributed equitably throughout Ontario as opposed to only being available to highly-resourced communities. Improving aged and inefficient air handling systems coupled with other building improvements, such as those listed in the Canada Greener Homes Initiative, could also help meet climate change goals thereby providing further benefits.

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Simply put, improving the indoor air Ontarians and Canadians breathe is not only good for their health but also for society and the economy. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to advance our climate change objectives.

Thank you for your consideration around this important issue and our Region keenly awaits your response.

Yours truly,

Jim Bradley, Regional Chair
Chair of the Board of Health
Niagara Region

cc: Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance
    Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health
    Hon. Mary Ng, Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development
    Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada
    
    Dean Allison, MP, Niagara West
    Vance Badawey, MP, Niagara Centre
    Tony Baldinelli, MP, Niagara Falls
    Chris Bittle, MP, St. Catharines
    Ontario’s Boards of Health

Enclosure
5.2 **PHD 10-2022**

Improving Indoor Air Quality to Sustainably Prevent COVID-19, Improve Health & Keep Society Open for Good

Moved by Councillor Witteveen
Seconded by Councillor Butters

That Report PHD 10-2022, dated June 14, 2022, respecting Improving Indoor Air Quality to Sustainably Prevent COVID-19, Improve Health & Keep Society Open for Good, **BE RECEIVED** and the following recommendations **BE APPROVED**:

1. That Regional Council, as the Board of Health, **DIRECT** the Chair to write to the Provincial Government (Minister of Health; the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; the Minister of Finance; and the Chief Medical Officer of Health) and the Federal Government (Minister of Health; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities; Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development; Minister of Finance; and the Chief Public Health Officer) requesting that they urgently:

   1.1 Update building codes to incorporate higher standards of air quality such that respiratory diseases, especially COVID-19 and other emerging infections, can be sustainably prevented in all new buildings, with regular updates to these building codes, as best available evidence evolves; and

   1.2 Create a fund to support small business and local organizations to upgrade the ventilation and filtration in their existing buildings, as well as, invest in validated air cleaning/disinfection technologies with demonstrated safety and effectiveness, so that current public spaces and workspaces can be made safer from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, including future pandemics of a respiratory virus; and


   **Carried**