September 15, 2021

Honourable David Piccini
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
minister.mecp@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Piccini,

Re: Wastewater Surveillance

Wastewater surveillance, the measurement of levels of COVID-19 viral RNA in wastewater, is proving to be a useful tool to help evaluate community-level infection trends, augment our traditional surveillance based on case reporting, monitor public health interventions, and anticipate human resource and other needs.

Here in Peterborough, thanks to the leadership of our partners at Trent University, we have been able to receive regular wastewater testing data from both upstream sites, such as our post-secondary campuses and retirement homes, as well as from two of our municipal wastewater treatment sites, the City of Peterborough and Millbrook.

Our experience to date has been that this additional source of surveillance has proven to be useful both in predicting an increase of human cases, as well as reassuring us during times when viral transmission has been very low. Looking ahead, we would like to see all of our Peterborough wastewater treatment sites included for surveillance. That would require funding to expand to another three testing sites: Norwood, Havelock and Lakefield.

Recent experience in Millbrook shows how sensitive wastewater surveillance can be at detecting the presence of the virus. In smaller sewer sheds, and in populations who may be hesitant to present for testing, wastewater surveillance may be the only indication that transmission is occurring.

The estimated cost of providing this service would be $1,500 per week per facility. This would allow for testing three days per week. It is also recommended that additional financial capacity be provided to expand testing to five times per week during periods of accelerated spread and that funding be provided for courier services to ensure samples get to the laboratory quickly enough to provide results to public health by the next day.

We believe the requested investment represents good value in providing population-based assessments of COVID-19 infection and transmission and ask the Minister to consider our request positively.

We look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

Mayor Andy Mitchell
Chair, Board of Health

cc: Dave Smith, MPP Peterborough-Kawartha
    David Piccini, MPP Northumberland-Peterborough South
    Laurie Scott, MPP Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock
    Dr. Christopher Kyle, Professor, Trent University
    Township of Asphodel-Norwood Council
    Township of Havelock-Belmont Methuen Council
    Township of Selwyn Council