April 16, 2014

The Honourable Glen R. Murray, Minister
Ministry of Transportation
Road Safety Policy Office
Safety Policy and Education Branch
1201 Wilson Avenue
Building "A", Room 212
Downsview, Ontario
M3M 1J8

Dear Honorable Glen R. Murray:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit’s (SMDHU) Board of Health to indicate our support for the proposed regulatory amendments to Bill 173- Keeping Ontario Roads Safe Act.

We would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) for their continued dedication and commitment to road safety in Ontario. The SMDHU is mandated by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) under the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS, 2008) to reduce the frequency, severity and impacts of preventable injury and of substance misuse. SMDHU staff work closely with community partners to improve road safety and decrease incidents involving motor vehicle occupants, pedestrians and cyclists in Simcoe Muskoka through a broad range of health promotion strategies that include increasing public awareness of and adoption of behaviors that are in accordance with legislation related to the prevention of injury and substance misuse. Bill 173 encompasses many of the critical education, enforcement and environmental strategies evidence suggests will support road safety for Ontarians.

According to a recent survey of Simcoe Muskoka residents (RRFFS, 2013) close to 30% of drivers report using a hand held mobile device at least occasionally while driving. Best practice evidence suggests that public education should include raising awareness of the issue of distracted driving and the need for change with respect to handheld device use and other distracted driving behaviors. The proposed amendments to Bill 173, including increased fines and demerit points for handheld device infractions, will further strengthen the strategies in place to reduce distracted driving and help to send the message that this behavior must end.

Health Canada recognizes that best practice measures in the area of impaired driving include both educational and therapeutic activities to positively influence the attitudes of convicted driving while under the influence drivers. In our assessment, the legislative amendments in Bill 173 that address impaired driving reflect best practice and will aid in curbing impaired driving.
Evidence has shown that improved active transportation infrastructure allows for increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians. Increased numbers of walkers and cyclists actually lower the risk for vehicle-pedestrian/cyclist collisions as drivers become more conscious and aware of others who more frequently share the road. We are pleased to see the proposed amendments to Bill 173 that support cyclist and pedestrian safety from a built environment as well as a walker, driver, rider behavior perspective.

To date, the SMDHU Board of Health has actively engaged in related road safety advocacy that includes: widening of paved shoulders for pedestrian and cycling safety, lowering the legal BAC limit to 0.05mg/ml and banning cell phone use while driving. As an organization we support the proposed amendments to Bill 173- Keeping Ontario Roads Safe and will continue to work with our community partners to decrease preventable injuries and deaths on Ontario roadways.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Barry Ward
Chair, Board of Health

c. The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Ontario Boards of Health
Linda Stewart, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Public Health Association
Simcoe Muskoka MPPs
North Simcoe and Central Local Health Integrated Network

References:

Ministry of Transportation- Road Safety Proposals to Reduce Distracted Driving, and to Improve Cyclist Safety in Ontario March 18” 2014.


Alcohol Interlock Programs: Enhancing Acceptance and Participation Compliance; Traffic Injury Research Foundation, 2005

Enhancing Cycling Safety in Ontario, August 2011, OMA