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The Ontario Association of Public
Health Nursing Leaders

*Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001*

June 22, 2016

Hon. Yasir Naqvi
Attorney General of Ontario
McMurtry-Scott Building
720 Bay St
Toronto ON
M7A2S9

Re: Consistent Application and Enforcement of Sandy's Law

Dear Minister Naqvi,

The Board of Directors and Members of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Ontario's Attorney General. Our 67 year old charity has a long history of working together with the Ontario Government to promote healthy public policy. Most recently, we have been providing evidence-based input on your government's plans for a provincial alcohol policy. As the Minister responsible for advising the Government on legal matters connected with legislation such as the Liquor License Act (LLA), we wanted to bring the following to your attention.

Under the LLA, Sandy's Law plays an important role in warning women about the dangers of drinking alcohol while pregnant, and requires premises to prominently display signs which state that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. With the expansion of beer sales, we are concerned this important law is not being adhered to. We urge your government to ensure its consistent application and enforcement. Through our various networks, we learned that there has been confusion in grocery stores and farmers' markets regarding the requirement for those premises to follow Sandy's Law. It is imperative that Sandy's Law be applied and enforced anywhere alcohol is sold in Ontario to ensure the consistency and the effectiveness of this legislation.

Since the introduction and unanimous approval of Sandy's Law by all political parties in 2004, the number and type of premises that are able to sell alcohol have increased. To ensure that Sandy's Law is effective at reducing the number of pregnancies that are exposed to alcohol, it is essential that Sandy's Law be applied and enforced in all locations where alcohol is permitted to be sold. Warning signs are more likely to be effective if they are easily recognized and highly visible. Consistently posting the signs at all points of alcohol sale will contribute to noticeability and recall and can lead to changes in consumer beliefs and behaviour.

You may be aware that in 2015, your government found through a series of province-wide roundtables that public knowledge of FASD was “limited at best”, with many women and men being unaware of the risks of alcohol use before, during and after pregnancy. Broad based awareness of the dangers of drinking alcohol in pregnancy such as posting warning signs is the first level of FASD prevention and an important part of a provincial strategy.

Drinking trends in Ontario show an alarming rise in the number of women consuming alcohol daily, drinking alcohol above the Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRADG) and consuming alcohol at risky levels. Women are also targeted by and exposed to an explosion of alcohol marketing directed at them. With the rate of unplanned pregnancies estimated at 50% and the rise of young women drinking alcohol at risky levels, the number of babies that will be exposed to alcohol is predicted to rise and as a result those affected by FASD. At an estimated cost of between \$1 to 3 million dollars per individual over a lifetime, Ontario cannot afford to ignore strategies aimed to prevent or decrease the incidence of FASD. With the number of grocery stores authorized to sell beer and wine expected to expand from 60-450 stores in the coming years, along with a growing number of farmers’ markets selling alcohol, any outlet permitted to sell alcohol needs a clear message and enforceable legislation regarding their requirement to follow Sandy’s Law.

In conclusion, the Ontario Public Health Association urges the government to ensure the consistent application and enforcement of Sandy’s Law wherever alcohol is sold in accordance with the Liquor License Act.

Thank you for your attention to this critical public health issue.

Pegeen Walsh



Executive Director
OPHA

cc: Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Hon. Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services