

Sample letter

Improving workplace health and safety in the mental health sector

[insert date]

Choose the recipient:

Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn, Minister
Ministry of Labour
14th Floor, 400 University Ave.
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1T7

Your Member of Provincial Parliament
Find your MPP's contact info here:
<http://www.ontla.on.ca/lao/en/members/>

Dear [insert recipient name],

[Start by introducing yourself, including where you work, your position and a bit about your own experience of violence in the workplace and its impact on you/your colleagues].

Across Ontario, workers in the mental health sector are facing increasing exposure to violence. As frontline workers, we are all too aware that many employers are simply not doing enough to control workplace violence; often they are failing to perform adequate risk assessments, and failing to put preventative procedures in place.

Just look at the Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care. While I support the move to lay charges against Waypoint for failure to protect staff and for operating an unsafe workplace, our system needs long-term solutions, and as **[Minister of Health/Minister of Labour/our local MPP]** we need your help.

As workers who risk our health and our lives every day, we are frustrated. Workers have the right to be safe at work and to be free from violence while doing our jobs. Often, I and others feel afraid to go to work because there is so much uncertainty about our own safety **[elaborate here if you would like]**.

With this in mind, we need better resources and mandatory staffing levels to prevent workplace violence. The right to refuse unsafe work is also an essential component of prevention.

Patients/clients are safe and get the best care when mental health care workers are safe.. But our health care system is not delivering on this. As workers, we need to see evidence of improvements at the bedside, in the dining rooms, in the hallways, in the waiting rooms, in the emergency rooms, in the community, and anywhere else where frontline mental health care providers work.

Our mental health care system is at a breaking point; the system has been plagued by underfunding, staff cutbacks, crumbling infrastructure and increasing patient demands, complexity and acuity. Our managers are

rarely clinicians anymore, and decisions are being made on the basis of budgets, not what patients need. Patients need to trust their care providers, but trusting, therapeutic relationships are difficult to maintain when care providers are also expected to use physical force. Appropriate levels of security staffing are essential to positive patient outcomes.

Each day, my goal is not only to go to work, to provide excellent care to my patients/clients, but also to return home from work safely, to my family and my children. I fear that changes aren't happening fast enough, and that it will take devastating violence, perhaps death, for the government to act and implement the improvements that the system needs.

As mental health care workers, we need the tools to do our jobs.

Here is what we are asking for: [include one, multiple or all]

- Appropriate funding for proper and consistent staffing levels, both for safety and improved patient care. We need a return to practical mental health care, where you have time to sit down, talk, and get to know patients and where there isn't a revolving door of staff.
- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Ministry of Labour need to promote the *Violence, Aggression and Response Behaviours (VARB)* tools – these are helpful resources created by the Public Services Health and Safety Association to help organizations assess security and flagging systems, do organizational risk assessments, and assess individual client behaviour.
- Appropriate funding to “fill the gaps” identified through organizational risk assessments, including, but not limited, to self-defense training for all staff and measures to improve consistency of treatment for patients across the mental health care system.
- Amendment of the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* to include health care workers under the presumptive legislation with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Bring back the WSIB's Workwell Audit to ensure employers' compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Minister of Health/Minister of Labour/our local MPP, please help us get the changes our system needs. For frontline mental health workers, it truly is a matter of life and death.

Sincerely,

[sign and print your name]