



December 13, 2017

The Honourable Kevin Flynn, Minister  
Ontario Ministry of Labour  
400 University Avenue, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1T7

Via email: [kflynn.mpp@liberal.ola.org](mailto:kflynn.mpp@liberal.ola.org)

**Re: Occupational health and safety in mental health facilities**

Dear Minister Flynn:

I am writing in response to your announcement, last week, that your ministry will be devoting \$240,000 to a research project aimed at “preventing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in mental health care providers, and ensuring those with PTSD receive timely support to return to work,” to quote your December 7 news release. This research, the news release says, will “examine barriers to accessing supports to prevent and alleviate PTSD symptoms,” among other things.

While normally I am all in favour of research into workplace issues, last week’s announcement gives the impression that your government has failed utterly to comprehend what is happening in our mental health facilities. When police happen upon an assault in progress, they don’t study the problem, they intervene. That is what OPSEU members have been asking your government to do about workplace violence for some time now.

We do not need a study to know that the only sure way to “alleviate PTSD symptoms” is to prevent trauma from happening in the first place. What your government is saying to my members who work in mental health facilities is, essentially, this: “You are going to work in unimaginably unsafe working conditions. You are going to continue to suffer serious injuries on the job, and you may be killed. But don’t worry, we are studying the problem.”

Again, I support research. However, research will not do a thing for workers who are going to work right now, today, and wondering whether they are going to make it home safely tonight. If you are actually serious about solving the problem of violence in mental health facilities, then \$240,000 won’t cut it. Your government must make substantial investments in risk assessments, in staffing, in training, in equipment, and in facilities that are designed and built with safety in mind.

What needs to be done to keep both staff and patients safe is well known and well documented. The fact that you are not making the investments that staff and patients in mental health care so desperately need makes me think that the real motivation behind your \$240,000 announcement is

about public relations, not alleviating trauma. In my view your announcement is transparently designed to give the impression that your government is doing something about PTSD in mental health facilities when, in fact, it is doing nothing.

To say that I am disappointed is an understatement.

Minister, I know that you are knowledgeable about the violence faced by health care workers in general and mental health workers in particular. What I am asking you with this letter is that you act on that knowledge in a sincere and serious manner.

Thank you for your consideration. I am available to discuss this further with you at any time.

Yours truly,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas  
President

c: Pete Sheehan, President, OPSEU Local 329  
OPSEU Executive Board