

August 3, 2018

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Dear Minister:

I am writing to bring to your attention a matter of great urgency to ambulance communications officers (ACOs) represented by OPSEU.

For the past several years, low staffing numbers have been a cause of mounting concern. That concern has now grown to crisis proportions as dispatch centres sometimes operate at 50 per cent capacity – in other words, one worker is doing the job of two.

Efforts to remedy the severe shortage of ACOs have proved entirely unsuccessful. Past management had consistently failed to take the situation seriously or to act on any of the recommendations made by the Ministry Employee Relations Committee (MERC) to deal with the crisis. Although current branch management have been making an effort to address concerns, their efforts are all based on processes that are months away from providing any relief. We urgently require an immediate solution.

ACOs' health and personal and family lives have been gravely compromised. As stress levels grow, more workers fall sick, quit or go on leave. Those left must pick up the slack, increasing their own levels of stress. It is a vicious cycle that must be halted before it accelerates any further.

Management's refusal to address the crisis is already putting Ontario residents at grave risk. All it would take would be for one call to be dropped and a tragedy could occur – with significant negative consequences for the ministry and the reputation of the new government.

Minister, before the situation gets even worse, I am calling upon you to personally intervene with management in your central ambulance communication centres to launch a recruiting drive to fill the depleted ranks of ACOs. They are essential frontline staff and, as such, do not fall under the Premier's recently imposed freeze on the Ontario Public Service. For the safety and security of all Ontarians, the ministry must hire more ACOs as soon as possible.

I await your early response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Thomas".

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

c: Frank Wendling, co-chair, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care MERC