May 5, 2010

Honourable Laurel Broten
Minister of Children and Youth Services
56 Wellesley St. West, 14th Floor
Toronto ON M5S 2S3

Dear Minister Broten:

RE: Ministry of Children and Youth Services Funded Budgets

I am writing concerning the four budgets funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) that have been presented to the KFL&A Board of Health for consideration. The Board passed these budgets at its 28 April meeting through the following motion:

THAT the KFL&A Board of Health, with great reluctance once again, approve the 2010-2011 Ministry of Children and Youth Services Budget Submission for the Preschool Speech and Language Program, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Infant Hearing Screening Program, and Blind and Low Vision Program as presented, recognising that fewer children will receive the services that they need and that it will be impossible to meet the Ontario Public Health Standards for the Health babies, Healthy Children Programme, given the directives for these budgets from the MCYS; and

THAT the KFL&A Board of Health send a letter to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, acknowledging the Ministry’s recognition of the need for increased funding to the Infant Hearing Screening Program, and requesting that the Ministry give the same consideration to Preschool Speech and Language Program, Healthy Babies Healthy Children and Blind and Low Vision Program, and...

We thank the Ministry for its acknowledgement of the need to have an annual increment to the South Eastern Region Infant Hearing Program to maintain the integrity of this service. The recent investments in this program, through the recent one-time funding grants to purchase new ABAer hearing screening systems and the $23,628 increase in base funding for the 2010-2011 fiscal year, will allow KFL&A Public Health to provide stable, high-quality infant hearing services to infants and young children in our communities.

The funding for other MCYS funded programs, however, including Healthy Babies, Healthy Children (HBHC), Blind Low Vision and Preschool Speech and Language continue to be frozen. This situation will lead to reductions in these services, one of which (HBHC) is an Ontario Public Health Standard (OPHS). The directive to freeze these budgets by the ministry staff for these programmes puts them and the children who receive these services at risk.

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This Board is extremely concerned about the effect that this reduction in services will have on the children in this area and actress Ontario. First, 100 fewer pre-school children who need speech therapy receive this service than did in 2006. As you are aware, if a child has poor speech skills, learning at school is undermined and the child is at risk for poor social integration, with all of the attendant consequences. Freezing this budget undermines all of the other efforts that the Government of Ontario is making for the health of children and their success in the school system. This policy is short-sighted and harmful. In addition, the loss of up to two public health nurses in this area will reduce the early identification of children at risk through the HBHC programme. We feel very strongly that the integrity of this programme is being compromised and that children’s well being is being put at risk. It is highly awkward for us, as a Board, to be required to approve a frozen budget that we know will make it impossible to meet this OPHS.

Early childhood development is a critical time in one’s life, as it affects learning, behaviour and health throughout life. To ensure that services to support early childhood development continues without compromise, this Board requests that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services give the same consideration of investment for the Preschool Speech and Language, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, and Blind-Low Vision early intervention programs in the future. Without this investment in these programs, all of which have been frozen for yet another year, there will be additional consequent service reductions.

Our Medical Officer of Health, Dr Gemmill has written to you again recently on behalf of the Board to request a meeting with you to outline these concerns in more detail. There is an urgent need to have this conversation with you, so we trust that this meeting can be accommodated.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. We hope to meet with you soon.

Yours truly,

Beth Pater, Chair  
KFL&A Board of Health

Copy to: Board of Health members  
S. Weber, Manager, Early Years Programs Unit, MCYS  
G. Sutherland and C. MacLean, Program Consultants, Early Years Programs Unit, MCYS  
Hon. D. Duncan, Minister of Finance  
Hon. J. Gerretsen, MPP, Kingston and the Islands  
Hon. R. Hillier, MPP, Lanark, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington  
L. Stewart, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Boards of Health, Local Public Health Agencies