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From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? It is time for action

I had the opportunity to participate in the Pre-Budget Consultations of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs Jan. 19.

Pre-Budget consultations are an opportunity for committee members to hear from organizations and individuals about their suggestions of what they want included in the next budget. It is also an opportunity for opposition MPPs, like myself, to hear about areas where the government isn't providing the funding or service that Ontarians need.

This year, the committee travelled to Brampton to hear from people and organizations in Peel and the surrounding area. We had a variety of presenters, including the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Ontario, the Region of Peel and Catholic Family Services of Peel-Dufferin. I want to share with you some areas which struck me as areas that the government needs to address going forward.

A particularly poignant presentation was given by Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO). CMHO talked about the shocking wait times for our young people to find mental health care, saying that some children wait 18 months to find treatment in the Ottawa area. They also talked about the 60 per cent increase in hospitalizations for kids with mental health disorders over the last decade. Meanwhile there has been a 50 per cent cut to community services in the last 25 years.

To quote CMHO, ?If you're not providing kids with treatment in the community, they are going to go to hospital. The consequences are dire. Kids die while they wait.?

CMHO's testimony is even harder for me to hear because I spent 18 months studying mental health and addictions while serving on the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. In the end, we presented 23 recommendations to the legislature that were supported by all parties. That was seven years ago. Those 23 recommendations mean the government knows what is necessary to help our children. It is time to act.

Many organizations brought up issues that I have been hearing for some time. The City of Brampton and the Region of Peel raised concerns about the inaction surrounding the GTA West Corridor. It has been more than a year since the Minister of Transportation took the unprecedented move of suspending an Environmental Assessment, and there still has been no indication on whether the government intends to move forward with project. Others, like the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Ontario, raised the issue of Ontario having the highest electricity rates in North America, and that our lack of competitiveness in electricity is compounded by that fact that US states are offering incentive rates to attract and retain manufacturing investment.

What has become clear to me is that many of the issues raised by individuals and organizations have been issues for some time. It is time to act.