

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Government is abandoning families in need

I spoke in the Ontario Legislature Feb. 27 and called on the Minister of Community and Social Services to address the tragic instances of ?abandonment? in Ontario.

According to the Select Committee on Developmental Services, ?abandonment? refers to parents surrendering care of their child, ?in a desperate, last-ditch attempt to enable their children to access services.?

I was a member of the Select Committee in 2014, and heard stories from parents who were forced to make this excruciating decision because it was the only way to get service.

The unfortunate reality is that there are many families in Dufferin-Caledon waiting for service that they need. In some cases, the needs of a child are too much for a family, and even respite care or other in-home supports are not enough to ensure the safety of both the children and the family. For many families going through such a difficult circumstance, the long term solution for their child is to place them in a group home. However group home availability is limited and there are long waitlists. So, while a family may have been striving for years to keep their child at home, some are left in extremely desperate situations where there is no alternative. A common instance in these scenarios is that the child will end up being put into hospital or another institution not meant to care for a person with complex developmental needs. This creates a tragic cycle of the child being in and out of hospital because both the home and the hospital are not the proper place for them to be.

In the end, the system in Ontario essentially encourages parents in the above situation to abandon their child, because the government will be forced to take care of the child. Parents come to realize that the only way they can keep themselves and their child safe and get the care their child needs is to relinquish care of their child or ?go into crisis?; giving up all parental rights for their child.

The government knows about this issue. It was in the 2016 Ombudsman report and the 2014 report from the Select Committee on Developmental Services, yet the government still fails to stop these tragic cases from occurring. I am aware of nine cases of abandonment and seven cases of threatened abandonment in the Region of Peel in the last two years alone.

It is unbelievable that in Ontario today, parents who are trying their best, have to give up their children just to get the service they need. I firmly believe that it is time for the Minister to address this issue and ensure that no parent has to make this heart-wrenching decision in order to receive the service they need.

As I said in my question to the Minister, ?Abandonment is the last option for families who have been looking for help from your government. It's your government that is abandoning these families.?

