

Jones criticizes Ministry for abandoning families

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones has called on the Minister of Community and Social Services to address instances of abandonment in Ontario.

Jones raised the issue Monday in Question Period in the legislature, commenting that she has been working with a woman named Rose, a mother whose son, Ricardo, has severe developmental disabilities.

On Friday, Rose was told she must pick up Ricardo from the hospital or consider him abandoned, Jones said, according to Hansard.

Jones went on to say Rose needs to have her son in a group home for his safety and that of the family. But there are no spaces available, so she has to consider surrendering care of her son.

How can this be happening in Ontario in 2017? Jones asked.

Community and Social Services Minister Dr. Helena Jaczek replied that the government appreciates there are a number of challenges faced by families and caregivers dealing with those with developmental disabilities. She added she would like to know more about Rose's situation.

What we are doing is transforming the system here in Ontario, Jaczek said. We have committed, as we did to the Ombudsman, to ensure that crisis situations do not occur. We are trying to work very, very hard with our developmental services organizations to ensure that, before a situation becomes a crisis, we work with families and with caregivers to provide the very best solution.

While you're transforming the system, you're giving away \$14,000 to people who purchase a Tesla, Jones shot back. Individuals and families are having to abandon their children.

She also cited other examples, such as reports of a young adult being abandoned in Oakville, as well as nine abandonments and seven threats of abandonment of people with developmental disabilities in Peel Region in the last two years.

Abandonment is the last option for families who have been looking for help from your government, she added. It's your government that is abandoning these families.

Jaczek countered that the government spends about \$2 billion on developmental services.

I certainly don't remember hearing from either of the two opposition parties in their platforms in the last election about any increase in services for this very vulnerable population, whereas we have made an absolutely unprecedented investment since 2014, she added, stating that amounts to \$810 million over three years.

The Minister also stressed the government is making meaningful progress, and that has included eliminating the 2014 wait list for Passport funding to help adults with a developmental disability participate more fully in the community a year earlier than anticipated. She added the government has provided direct funding for an additional 13,000 adults with developmental disabilities, bringing the total number of individuals served by Passport to about 24,000.

As MPP for Dufferin-Caledon I have heard from many families with children with developmental disabilities who are struggling to find the care they need, Jones stated later. It is an unfortunate reality that some families are driven to relinquishing care of their loved ones to find the care they need.

These families are doing their best, but they need help to care for the complex needs of their children, she added. However, the structure of the system means that when a family is not receiving the service they need, going into crisis or abandoning their child is the only way the Ministry will provide them service.

Jones stated Jaczek is aware of this issue, pointing out it was mentioned 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, she declared.