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MUNICIPALITY OF CHATHAM-KENT

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HEALTH & FAMILY SERVICES
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

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April 24, 2007

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
22nd Floor
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

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Dear Minister Wynne:

**RE: ORAL HEALTH SCREENING BY THE CHATHAM-KENT PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT
TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE ST. CLAIR CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care authorizes Public Health Units to screen children for dental disease. This authority is found in the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)*. Part 11 of the HPPA sets out provisions for "Health Programs and Services". The HPPA clearly provides that Boards of Health must superintend, provide, or insure the provision of school dental services and screening programs to reduce the morbidity and mortality of disease. Furthermore, Regulation 570 (School Health Services and Programs) under the HPPA requires the Boards of Health to conduct "oral screening" in accordance with the *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines*.

School dental screening involves a quick (30-60 second) visual assessment by a registered dental hygienist using a sterilized mirror and a light. School dental screening is an act that poses no risk of harm to students similar to that of a head lice check, something that is routinely done in schools without specific parental consent. Schools are the only practical place to screen children because of the accessibility of the students.

In February 2004, staff of the Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit was informed that our long standing practice of using a negative consent process for these screenings was no

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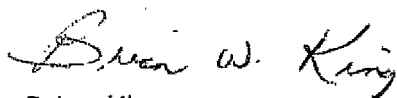
longer acceptable to the St. Clair Catholic District School Board. Based on legal advice from their lawyer, we are now required to have a positive consent from the parent in order to visually screen these children. While our Board has respected the School Board's position, it has led to a significant decrease in access to the children by our staff and thereby to dental care for the children enrolled in the St. Clair Catholic District School Board. Our public board, Lambton Kent District School Board did not require any changes.

In April of 2005, we were told by our Ministry of Health representative Dr. Sandra Bennett that the Ministry of Education had decided not to take a Provincial position on the issue as it related to only one local school board. It has since come to our attention that our neighbouring health units connected with the Thames Valley District School Board are facing the same issue regarding a change in consent.

Our local experience has found that using a positive consent process has decreased our access to the children from approximately 95% to 60%. Children that are not screened may have dental conditions that go undetected or that could have been detected earlier. In addition, children do not have the opportunity to access funded preventative/or emergency services because these services are offered based on screening results.

We are requesting that the Minister of Education investigate this issue and support not only the Chatham-Kent Board of Health but support Public Health Units province wide in providing equal access to dental screening and care for all children enrolled in the school system here and across the province.

Sincerely,



Brian King
Chair
Chatham-Kent Board of Health

- c. Pat Hoy, M.P.P., Chatham-Kent Essex Constituency Office
- Maria Van Bommel, M.P.P., Lambton – Kent – Middlesex Constituency Office
- Gayle Stucke, Director, Lambton Kent District School Board
- Paul Wubben, Director, St. Clair Catholic District School Board
- Dr. David Colby, Acting Medical Officer of Health, Chatham-Kent Public Health
- Dr. Wayne McKay, Dental Consultant, Chatham-Kent Public Health
- Ontario Boards of Health