

Ministry of Health
Hon. Christine Elliott
777 Bay Street, 5th floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2J3

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Hon. Todd Smith
438 University Avenue, 7th floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2K8

April 11th, 2021

Dear Minister Elliott and Minister Smith,

I am writing to you as a former head of the Children's Services Division in Ontario, former deputy minister and Family Court judge and as someone whose career extends back to when we made the decision to establish what was then called the Syl Apps Secure Treatment Centre. I am very concerned about the decision of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to close the 24 bed intensive mental health treatment program for youth with complex and acute mental health issues in secure custody and detention at Syl Apps Youth Centre.

I am a strong supporter of the Youth Criminal Justice Act and am pleased that one result of the Act has been a major reduction in the number of youth in custody and a greater focus on diversion and on support and treatment in the community. However, this does not change the fact that there are still many youth whose behaviour places themselves or others at serious risk and who need security and intensive treatment. I have been told by several persons who still work in the field that the 24 bed program at Syl Apps Youth Centre has been an enormously important program for these young persons and that it has had success with those facing severe emotional and psychological challenges.

It makes perfect sense to me to reduce the number of open and secure custody beds across the province. However, it is a very different thing to close an essential treatment facility which receives referrals from other youth centres that are unable to meet the complex, intensive treatment needs of a small number of young persons in their care. If the rationale is that somehow these youth can be absorbed into the rest of the system, the fact that referrals to Syl Apps are required seems to me an answer to that. I think it is wrong to assume this

specialized treatment can be provided by fragmented clinical resources in the community. General secure custody facilities are simply unable to serve those with the most acute and complex mental health needs.

I strongly encourage you to reconsider the decision to include this very important program on the list of secure and open custody programs you are planning to close.

Thank you for considering this request

Yours Sincerely

George Thomson