

August 4, 2026

Via Email:

premier@gov.nl.ca
JPSPMinister@gov.nl.ca
joanne.thompson@parl.gc.ca
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Dear Premier Wakeham,
Minister Conway-Ottenheimer,
And Members of Parliament Thompson and Osborne:

Subject: Request to Collaborate Regarding Growing Municipal Concerns

On behalf of the City of St. John's, I am writing to express Council's, and in essence our residents' growing concern regarding the increasing impacts of substance use, mental health challenges, and homelessness in our community, and to call for a more coordinated and transparent response from both the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Over the past several years, the City has seen a steady increase in concerns from residents and businesses about open drug use, discarded needles, aggressive panhandling, public intoxication, and other behaviours occurring in our public spaces. These concerns are being raised in parks, playgrounds, trails, downtown streets, neighbourhoods, and other shared spaces throughout our city.

Residents are telling us they no longer feel safe using some of our public spaces. While City staff continue to respond to reports of discarded needles and other hazards and work to maintain safe, welcoming public spaces for everyone, we are limited in our ability to address the underlying causes of these issues or respond to the broader health, housing, and public safety challenges that contribute to them.

We recognize that addiction, homelessness, and mental illness are complex issues that require compassionate, evidence-based solutions. We also recognize that municipalities cannot solve these challenges alone. Health care, addictions treatment, supportive housing, criminal law, income supports, and policing all involve responsibilities shared between the provincial and federal governments. Lasting solutions require coordinated action across all orders of government.

At the same time, residents expect governments to ensure that their community remains safe. Increasingly, residents are asking questions that municipalities cannot answer.

They want to know:

- What is the overall strategy to address open drug use in public spaces while ensuring people receive appropriate health and social supports?
- What are the current legal consequences or intervention options when illegal drug use occurs repeatedly in parks, playgrounds, sidewalks, and other public spaces?
- Many individuals experiencing homelessness or addiction have limited places to go between accessing shelters, meal programs, and other community services. Is there a coordinated plan to address these service gaps by providing safe, appropriate daytime spaces where people can access supports, reducing the need to gather in parks and other public spaces?
- What additional investments are being made in prevention, early intervention, detoxification, treatment, recovery, supportive housing, and long-term mental health services to address the root causes of addiction?
- What is the current status of the proposed auxiliary policing model discussed as part of police transformation, and what role will it play in responding to open drug use and non-criminal situations involving mental health, addiction, and homelessness?
- What is the transition plan for individuals currently residing at Horizons, including where residents will be accommodated, how continuity of housing, health care, addiction treatment, and social supports will be maintained, how municipalities will be consulted throughout the process, and what measures are being taken to ensure the transition does not unintentionally increase pressures on public spaces and neighbourhoods in other areas of the City?
- What measures are being taken to reduce discarded needles and other public safety concerns while maintaining effective harm reduction services?
- How are the federal and provincial governments working together to ensure communities are both compassionate and safe?

We believe there is a need for greater transparency, accountability, and collaboration among all orders of government.

Residents want to know that governments are working together. They want to understand what actions are underway, what outcomes are expected, and how progress will be measured.

Municipal governments are often the first to receive calls from concerned residents and businesses. We are the order of government that residents see most often and, understandably, the one that bears the brunt of their frustration when these complex issues persist.

Yet, despite being on the front lines, municipalities have the fewest legislative, health care, housing, and enforcement tools available to address the root causes of these challenges. While we remain committed to maintaining safe and welcoming public spaces, many of the longer-term solutions fall within provincial and federal jurisdiction. However, we can provide valuable input when properly engaged. Earlier consultation, ongoing communication, and a shared understanding of local impacts will lead to better policies, stronger implementation, and greater public confidence.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with representatives from both governments and our community partners to discuss these issues, better understand current initiatives, and identify opportunities to strengthen our collective response.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working together to ensure that our communities remain safe, healthy, and welcoming for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Danny Breen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Danny" and last name "Breen" clearly distinguishable.

Danny Breen, Mayor

cc: St. John's City Council Members