

STEPHENVILLE-PORT AUX BASQUES RURAL SECRETARIAT REGIONAL COUNCIL
OFFICE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Hon. Susan Sullivan
Department of Health and Community Services
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

April 2nd, 2014

Dear Minister Sullivan,

As you are aware, Rural Secretariat Regional Councils are government appointed bodies mandated to submit policy advice documents to the Provincial Government on issues that impact the region.

In 2012, the Stephenville-Port aux Basques Regional Council deliberated on issues that impact the region, and through this process access to radiation therapy arose as a key concern. This concern then became a catalyst for the Council to initiate a research project on healthcare access in the region.

In partnership with the Health Research Unit at Memorial University and the Corner Brook-Rocky Harbour Regional Council, we undertook an extensive research project in western Newfoundland (including both the Stephenville-Port aux Basques and Corner Brook-Rocky Harbour regions). This research included a literature review, online and paper survey, as well as informal focus groups. In total, 1048 surveys were complete, paired with 10 focus groups. A copy of this research report was sent to you in March 2014 as part of a policy advice document submitted jointly by both Regional Councils.

This research project was a broad study, designed to examine the issues, barriers and solutions to accessing healthcare services in the region. As part of this study, respondents were asked if they had adequate access to a number of health services, including radiation therapy.

The Regional Council would like to bring it to your attention that radiation therapy was listed as one of the least accessible services, preceded only by cardiac bypass surgery. Of the 1048 survey respondents, only 11.8% indicated that they felt they had adequate access to radiation therapy, while 42.6% indicated they were unsure and 45.6% indicated that they did not feel they had adequate access.

These findings align with many other concerns that have been publically expressed throughout the region on the lack of availability of radiation treatment, and the requirement to travel to and from St. John's to access these services.

The Council is pleased that funding was announced in the recent budget for a study on a potential radiation unit for the new hospital in Corner Brook. We recommend that a radiation unit be included in

the new hospital, and reiterate the importance of having this service available in western Newfoundland. With this, we would like to emphasize the difficulties that individuals encounter when having to travel far distances to access radiation; notably financial barriers, stress associated with long distance travel – particularly when sick, spending extended time away from family and loved ones or having to relocate families for the duration of treatment.

The Council's research supports community concerns around a lack of access to radiation treatment, and also indicates that distance to travel and services not being available in the area are the main barriers to accessing health services in the region.

We ask that you please consider our recommendation and comments within this letter, and invite you to contact us with any questions you may have. We would also be happy to make ourselves available if you would like to arrange a time to meet and discuss our research findings and recommendations.

Kind regards,

s.40(1)



Ms. Dianna Kung

s.40(1)



Mr. Calvin White

Co-Chairs of the Stephenville-Port aux Basques Regional Council

Cc: Hon. Steve Kent, Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement

Dr. Bruce Gilbert, Assistant Deputy Minister, Office of Public Engagement

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Ms. Dianna Kung
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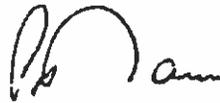
Dear Ms. Kung and Mr. White:

Thank you for your letter dated April 2, 2014 and received April 15, 2014 regarding the final report (July 2013) of the research project prepared by the Health Research Unit at the Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University. I note that the previous Minister of Health and Community Services, the Honourable Susan Sullivan, replied on April 9, 2014 to your joint council's earlier correspondence and I have attached a copy for your reference.

As mentioned in Minister Sullivan's earlier correspondence, the issues of wait times, access to physicians and access to specialized health services for the region remains a priority for the delivery of quality health care. Issues highlighted in the report including specialized diagnostic and treatment services will be considered by both Western Health and the Department of Health and Community Services in the programming and planning for the new hospital in Corner Brook.

Thank you for following up on this report and continuing to advocate for the residents of the west coast.

Sincerely,



PAUL DAVIS, M.H.A.
District of Topsail
Minister

/cf

Attach.

cc Honourable Steve Kent
Dr. Bruce Gilbert
Dr. Susan Gillam