



Motion on Emergency Room Reform

Moved by Mayor Marianne Meed Ward - Burlington, Seconded by Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie - Toronto

February 6, 2026

WHEREAS growing pressures across the Ontario healthcare system are increasing patient volumes in emergency rooms (ER), requiring more complex care, and contributing to longer patient wait times in ERs for residents in Ontario's largest municipalities; and

WHEREAS Health Quality Ontario data from October 2025 reports that patients needing admission to the hospital waited an average of 19-20 hours, with high-urgency patients waiting close to 5 hours on average to be seen by a physician; and

WHEREAS in December 2023, the Auditor General of Ontario reported that significant hospital staffing shortages were reducing access to timely emergency care; and ¹

WHEREAS the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario reported in March 2023 that ER wait times were increasing significantly with the longest wait times recorded in over 15 years and that provincial funding was \$21.3 billion short to maintain current health programs through 2028; and ²

WHEREAS according to the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), Ontario has had the lowest per capita hospital expenditure in Canada since 2018; and ³

WHEREAS according to the OHA, approximately 4,200 alternate-level-care (ALC) patients remain in acute beds (40% awaiting long-term care), worsening ER delays; and

WHEREAS Canadian ER researchers have highlighted that between 8,000 and 15,000 Canadians die prematurely as a result of ER overcrowding; and ⁴

WHEREAS reports of patients dying in crowded ERs across Canada are increasing, such as 16-year-old Finlay van der Werken who waited over 8 hours in an Oakville ER without being seen

¹ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, "Value-for-Money Audit: Emergency Departments," Dec. 2023, pg. 3.

² Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, "[Ontario Health Sector: Spending Plan Review](#)," Health Report, March 8, 2023.

³ Ontario Hospital Association, "[Ontario Hospitals – Leaders in Efficiency](#)," July 2025 Report, pg. 5.

⁴ Dr. Raghu Venugopal and Dr. Alan Drummond, "Venugopal and Drummond: [Doug Ford has failed to fix Ontario's ER hospital crisis](#)," *Ottawa Citizen*, February 19, 2025



by a physician and tragically passed away on February 9, 2024 from pneumonia that developed into sepsis; and

WHEREAS ER delays are contributing to excessive ambulance offload times, adding undue strain on response capacity of municipal paramedic services across Ontario; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has taken important steps to improve health care in Ontario, however additional funding and staffing resources for hospitals to reduce ER wait times and increase capacity to provide timely access to care for all patients in ER's remains critical; and

WHEREAS despite growing concerns regarding staffing shortages in and closures of ERs across Ontario, as well as failure to meet federal standards such as the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale, the Provincial Government continues to receive full contributions of Canada Health Transfers from the federal government.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Ontario's Big City Mayors call on the Provincial Ministry of Health to take immediate action to reduce ER wait times with consideration for the importance of enhanced ER triage protocols and increased funding to strengthen emergency readiness;

AND THAT Ontario's Big City Mayors call on the Provincial Ministry of Health to introduce Finlay's Law to ensure that no child in Ontario is left without timely emergency medical care in hospitals by:

- Setting legal maximum ER wait times for children under 18 (e.g., physician assessment within 2 hours, admission within 8 hours).
- Mandating safe pediatric nurse-to-patient and physician-to-patient ratios in emergency settings.
- Establish independent oversight to audit hospitals, investigate pediatric ER deaths, and enforce compliance.
- Mandate public, independent, and timely (within 1 year) inquiry by the Chief Coroner of Ontario of every pediatric death in an ER waiting area.
- Fund better pediatric emergency readiness, including staffing, training, and infrastructure.

AND THAT Ontario's Big City Mayors call on the Federal Ministry of Health to enforce the principles and requirements of the *Canada Health Act* through its spending power of Canada Health Transfers to Ontario by:

- monitoring compliance to national health standards, such as Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) in ERs;
- and establishing and ensuring compliance with a new sepsis care standard.

AND THAT a copy of this resolution be sent to the Premier of Ontario, the Ontario Minister of Health, the federal Minister of Health, the Ontario Medical Association (OMA), the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).