



Kate Kirkham
Chief, Paramedic Services
DSSMSSAB

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Thank you for the opportunity to share a professional perspective on the potential benefits of the Hope's Cradle initiative for the community of Sault Ste. Marie.

As Chief of Paramedic Services for the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB), I bring twenty-eight years of experience as a paramedic, including the last four in this leadership position. I also lead DSSMSSAB's involvement in implementing a community-wide homelessness strategy focused on addressing the complex and interconnected challenges facing vulnerable populations in our region.

In recent years, the landscape of 911 calls has changed. Where paramedics once predominantly responded to trauma, accidents, and acute medical events, they now see complex mental health crises, opioid poisonings, and the broad impacts of social vulnerability. The frequency of opioid-related calls and mental health emergencies has increased. This rising trend has strained emergency services and exposed gaps in community safety nets.

Paramedics often encounter people facing the consequences of unmet social and health needs. This includes mothers who may not be able to safely care for themselves or their infants. These cases often arise amidst complex and compounding challenges such as untreated mental health conditions, substance use, poverty, domestic violence, and social isolation.

Paramedics are sometimes the first or only point of healthcare contact for these mothers. They may be called to assist with an emergency birth outside the hospital or to give care when there's a concern for an infant's wellbeing. They see babies born in unsafe environments and mothers who are unwilling or unable to reach out for help.

These concerns are not hypothetical; they reflect the real experiences of paramedics in Sault Ste. Marie. We know that not every high-risk situation leads to a 911 call. Some of the most vulnerable individuals may never seek help, leaving them and their babies at significant risk. Given the socioeconomic challenges, mental health needs, and social stigma that persists in Sault Ste. Marie, the risk of infant abandonment, while rare, remains

a real and concerning possibility. A non-judgmental and supportive alternative like Hope's Cradle may offer a safe and effective solution in these unusual and serious cases.

As a leader in paramedic services and a partner in addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, substance use, and poverty in our city, I believe that an initiative like Hope's Cradle could provide meaningful protection for some of the most vulnerable members of our community, particularly mothers and at-risk infants. I support the implementation of Hope's Cradle in Sault Ste. Marie.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Kirkham', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kate Kirkham
Chief of Paramedic Services