

The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie
COUNCIL REPORT

June 23, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Peter Johnson, Fire Chief
DEPARTMENT: Fire Services
RE: Hope's Cradle

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding Hope's Cradle.

Background

A resolution was brought forward on October 10, 2023, stating:

Whereas a person may choose to bring their pregnancy to term, but may not be willing or able to care for the child due to extenuating circumstances that may include, but are not limited to: poverty or financial hardship; gender based violence; involvement in human trafficking; struggles with mental health and/or addiction; religious and/or social stigma; sexual violence such as rape or incest; and

Whereas these factors could also contribute to individuals being unable to access services within the system such as abortion or adoption; and

Whereas stigmatizing the need for a person to surrender a baby without question or penalty has led to babies being left in unsafe situations, resulting in the otherwise preventable death of some infants, and

Whereas while the preservation of birth parent information, relationships and cultural backgrounds are all very important, saving the life of the infant in these dire situations must be the first priority; and

Whereas Hope's Cradle is a safe alternative to an unsafe abandonment, serving as a last resort for birth parents and infants who need it; and

Whereas alternatives that encourage prevention of unsafe abandonment will save the lives of these infants.

Now Therefore Be It Resolved that staff be requested to work with appropriate agencies and report back to council with recommendations for the implementation of Hope's Cradle in a central location in Sault Ste. Marie.

Hope's Cradle is a secure, temperature-controlled, safe surrender site installed at a designated community site. It allows a parent or guardian in crisis to anonymously and safely leave an unharmed newborn in the care of authorities. It has been developed in partnership with the non-profit organization Gems for Gems. The initiative is designed to prevent infant abandonment and offer a compassionate option for individuals who feel they have no other recourse.

The cradle is accessible from the outside of the building and is equipped with a silent alarm system that notifies internal personnel immediately upon use. Inside the cradle, parents are offered supportive resources and a letter explaining the process and available help. The safety and well-being of the infant are prioritized at all times, and child welfare services are promptly engaged upon use.

Analysis

As part of gathering details for this report, the following community stakeholders were contacted to discuss the resolution: the Children's Aid Society of Algoma, City of Sault Ste. Marie Police Services, Nogdawindamin Family and Community Services, and Adopt Ontario.

All of these community stakeholders have submitted letters outlining their position (see attached).

Hope's Cradle provides a mechanism for the anonymous and safe surrender of newborns through partnerships between a community stakeholder (host site) and child welfare agencies. While Ontario does not have explicit "Safe Haven" legislation, this practice raises concerns brought forward by the Children's Aid Society of Algoma (CAS) and is based on knowledge of child welfare practices, including the Child, Youth and *Family Services Act, 2017* (CYFSA), which is the legislation that directs child welfare practices in Ontario.

The supplied letter states that CYFSA, 2017, establishes a legal framework for adoption in the province of Ontario and establishes openness as the default approach to adoption in this province. Openness in adoption means an adopted child may maintain some degree of contact with their birth parents, siblings, extended family members, or other individuals with whom the child had a significant relationship prior to the adoption.

In summary, Children's Aid Societies are mandated under the CYFSA to protect children and support families. While CAS agencies are committed to child safety, they have expressed concerns that Hope's Cradle:

- Circumvents the legislated intake and assessment process;

- Prevents identification and evaluation of the family's situation, including possible reunification or kinship placement options; and
- Limits the child's ability to know their biological family, medical history, or ancestry.

As such, CAS may argue that supporting the existing child protection framework is more consistent with the best interests of the child and the integrity of Ontario's child welfare system.

The City of Sault Ste. Marie Police Service was consistent with CAS, stating, "while the initiative is well-intentioned, existing legislated processes already allow for the safe and responsible transfer of child custody." Further, Police Services consulted with their Statistical Analysis Unit and senior leadership to determine that there is no data (locally) to support the need for this initiative.

Police Services has also raised operational and legal concerns about the anonymous surrender of children outside of a formal legal process. Key issues include:

- The potential conflict with section 218 of the *Criminal Code* (Abandonment of a Child), which remains open to interpretation;
- Challenges in conducting investigations or validating that the surrender was voluntary, non-coerced, or free from criminal circumstances; and
- Difficulty in tracing any history of abuse or neglect if the identity is unknown.

Police Services prefer intervention through the formal CAS referral and legal custody framework already in place to ensure appropriate oversight and accountability.

In consultation with Nogdawindamin Family and Community Services, there was concern about the implementation of this initiative. The concerns discussed centred around the lack of ability to continue with continuity in maintaining Indigenous heritage and cultural background. There would be detrimental impacts on a child's well-being that resembled actions such as the "60's scoop" and the legacy of residential schools.

The Chief Executive Officer from Nogdawindamin strongly encouraged that the City consult with the seven North Shore communities and other Indigenous agencies in Sault Ste. Marie to establish a path forward before implementation is decided.

Nogdawindamin Family and Community Services have opposed the implementation of Hope's Cradle due to the risk of cultural erasure and the historical context of child apprehension in Canada. Concerns include:

- The loss of identity, ancestry, and connection to community which may have long-term psychological and spiritual impacts on Indigenous children;
- A continued pattern of separating Indigenous children from their culture, echoing harmful legacies such as the Sixties Scoop and residential schools; and
- The inability of Indigenous child welfare agencies to assert jurisdiction or support culturally appropriate alternatives when the child's origin is unknown.

From a reconciliation and rights-based perspective, Indigenous leaders and agencies advocate for solutions that prioritize family preservation and culturally informed care.

Discussions with the Adoption Council of Ontario (ACO) focused on acknowledging the intent behind Hope's Cradle to provide an anonymous avenue for parents to safely relinquish their child; they also state that the program contradicts legislation currently laid out in CYFSA 2017. Citing "the act speaks directly to the implementing prevention, early intervention, and community support services for children and their families". ACO has offered to provide support, education, and outreach to staff or families.

Adoption Council of Ontario has ethical and professional reservations, including:

- The lack of transparency and documentation in anonymous surrender can hinder future adoption planning, openness arrangements, and the child's right to access their origin story;
- Missed opportunities for open adoption or family-based solutions, which are increasingly considered best practice in Ontario; and
- Concern that Hope's Cradle could create a parallel, informal pathway to adoption without oversight from Ontario's adoption authorities.

ACO supports enhanced crisis intervention services, pregnancy support, and access to counseling within the existing legal framework rather than the creation of an alternative surrender mechanism.

While Hope's Cradle aims to provide a life-saving and compassionate option for parents in crisis, as stated in the letters attached, key community stakeholders do not support its implementation. Their concerns are rooted in the potential for unintended consequences, particularly around the loss of identity, disconnection from cultural heritage, and deviation from Ontario's established legislative framework for child protection and family services. These concerns must be weighed carefully, particularly around the long-term implications for the child's

Hope's Cradle

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identity, access to heritage, and legal safeguards provided by current provincial legislation. An ongoing dialogue with these stakeholders is essential to ensure that any action taken reflects a shared commitment to the best interests of vulnerable children while respecting legal, cultural, and ethical considerations.

Given the input received from stakeholders involved directly with adoption and children's services, staff recommends not proceeding with a Hope's Cradle initiative at this time.

Financial Implications

The upfront financial implications of implementing Hope's Cradle are estimated between \$30,000 and \$50,000. The initiative will also incur ongoing operational costs, which are currently not available. A suitable location would also have to be determined prior to implementation.

The funding of Hope's Cradle would also have to be further reviewed with community stakeholders should Council decide to proceed.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact

This is an operational matter not articulated in the corporate strategic plan.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Fire Chief dated June 23, 2025, concerning Hope's Cradle be received as information.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Johnson

Fire Chief

705.949.3333

p.johnson@cityssm.on.ca



Children's Aid Society of Algoma

Société de aide à l'enfance d'Algoma

Head Office: 191 Northern Ave East, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6B 4H8

Phone: 705-949-0162

Toll Free: 1-888-414-3571

Fax: 705-949-4747

Website: www.algomacas.org

February 13, 2025

Peter Johnson CMM III, Fire Chief
Sault Ste. Marie Fire Services
72 Tancred St. P6A 2W1

Re: Hope's Cradle

Dear Chief Johnson,

Thank you for inviting the Children's Aid Society of Algoma to provide input into the study of the possible establishment of a Hope's Cradle in Sault Ste. Marie. We are aware that Hope's Cradle is intended to provide, "a safe and anonymous surrender of the baby thus protecting its life and the anonymity of the mother. Provided the baby shows no signs of abuse, the anonymity of the mother will be entirely protected."

During my discussion with you, and my discussion with Councillor Caputo, I shared concerns related to the implementation of such a program. These concerns are based on knowledge of child welfare practice, including the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 (CYFSA)*, which is the legislation that directs child welfare practices in Ontario.

The Preamble of the *CYFSA* states, "Children and families have better outcomes when services build on their strengths. Prevention services, early intervention services and community support services build on a family's strengths and are invaluable in reducing the need for more disruptive services and interventions... Services to children and families should, wherever possible, help maintain connections to their communities." Further, the Purpose of the *CYFSA* states, "While parents may need help in caring for their children, that help should give support to the autonomy and integrity of the family unit and, wherever possible, be provided on the basis of mutual consent... Services to children and young persons should be provided in a manner that that recognizes their cultures, heritages, traditions, connection to their communities, and the concept of the extended family."

The Children's Aid Society of Algoma believes that Hope's Cradle does not afford time and opportunity for the necessary clinical services to occur to meet this statutory requirement. Additionally, the Hope's Cradle model risks that infants may be relinquished without the willful consent of a parent where that parent is a victim of violence or human trafficking.

The *CYFSA* establishes the legal framework for adoption in the province of Ontario, and establishes openness as the default approach to adoption in this province. Openness in adoption means an adopted child may maintain some degree of contact with their birth parents, siblings, extended family members, or other individuals with whom the child had a significant relationship prior to the adoption. There are numerous

benefits of openness, including opportunities for a child to have an accurate and positive sense of identity and self-worth, reducing the impact of loss and facilitating grieving, and maintaining connections to relationships that are meaningful and beneficial to the child. Openness requires the personal information of important individuals in a child's life to be obtained by the Children's Aid Society. Relinquishment of an infant through Hope's Cradle may not afford an opportunity for the parent to receive independent advice about their rights and obligations. It may also cause the loss of custodial and access rights of the second biological parent without their knowledge or consent. If a situation were to arise where an infant was relinquished by an individual to a Hope's Cradle, the Children's Aid Society of Algoma would be required to make efforts to identify the infant's parents, as well as to establish if the infant has First Nation, Metis or Inuit heritage.

The Hope's Cradle model does not afford a child access to critical information about their identity and their heritages. The *CYFSA* directs that, "If a society intends to begin planning for the adoption of a First Nations, Inuk or Métis child, the society shall give written notice of its intention to a representative chosen by each of the child's bands and First Nations, Inuit or Métis communities. If a representative chosen by each of the child's bands or First Nations, Inuit or Métis communities receives notice...each band and community may, within 60 days of the representative receiving the notice, prepare its own plan for the care of the child." Without critical identifying information, rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities to plan for the care and well being of their members may be infringed.

In a situation where an infant is relinquished to a Hope's Cradle, the Duty to Report provisions from Section 125 of the *CYFSA* requires immediate and direct reporting by any person having knowledge of the relinquishment to the appropriate Children's Aid Society or Indigenous Child Well Being Agency.

To permit infant relinquishment in a manner that addresses these considerations, the Children's Aid Society of Algoma recommends that you consult with AdoptOntario, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, and the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services. Such consultations may facilitate the development of processes that address these considerations.

Respectfully,



Krista Budau, Director of Services
Children's Aid Society of Algoma

cc: Tracy Willoughby, Executive Director
Dawn Dubois, Lead Council,

KB/ki



A Modern Police Service for a Safer Tomorrow

May 2, 2025

Peter Johnson, CMM III
Fire Chief
Sault Ste. Marie Fire Services
72 Tancred Street
Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A2W1

Dear Chief Johnson

RE: Hope's Cradle

Thank you for considering the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service as a community partner in your exploration of the Hope's Cradle initiative. We appreciate the intent behind this initiative and recognize its goal of providing a safe alternative for infant surrender. However, after thorough consultation with our Statistical Analysis Unit and discussions with senior leadership, the data does not support the need for this initiative in the Sault Ste. Marie area.

While the initiative is well-intentioned, existing legislated processes already allow for the safe and responsible transfer of child custody. These methods ensure proper oversight while safeguarding the welfare of both the child and the parent(s). Additionally, the anonymity associated with Hope's Cradle raises significant concerns, as it could hinder necessary investigative processes. In cases where there are indications of abuse, coercion, lack of consent, or underlying issues such as human trafficking or intimate partner violence, anonymity would obstruct our ability to intervene appropriately.

The Children's Aid Society of Algoma has also expressed concerns regarding the initiative. As outlined in their correspondence, Hope's Cradle does not provide the necessary time or structure for statutory clinical services to be properly conducted. I concur with Krista Budau of the Children's Aid Society of Algoma that further consultation with key stakeholders is essential before considering any steps forward.

Currently, mothers in crisis have the option to surrender their infants at hospitals through a process that, while not anonymous, ensures a warm hand-off. This approach allows for immediate medical and social assessments, ensuring that no external pressures, coercion, or extenuating circumstances are at play. It also provides the mother with access to critical support services, which could influence this profound decision.

Given the lack of data-driven justification and the concerns raised by other community partners, I am unable to support the implementation of Hope's Cradle in Sault Ste. Marie at this time.

580 Second Line E, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6B 4K1
Phone (705) 949-6300 • TTY (705) 759-7349
www.saultpolice.ca



Sault Ste. Marie
POLICE

A Modern Police Service for a Safer Tomorrow

Thank you again for engaging us in this important discussion. Should further consultations take place, we would be open to participating to ensure that any initiative aligns with the best interests of the community and those it seeks to support.

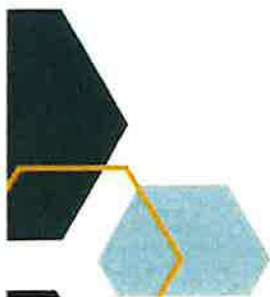
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Duguay'.

Brent Duguay
Interim Chief of Police

BD/II

580 Second Line E, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6B 4K1
Phone (705) 949-6300 • TTY (705) 759-7349
www.saultpolice.ca





March 31, 2025

Peter Johnson, CMM III, Fire Chief
Sault Ste. Marie Fire Services
72 Tancred St.
P6A 2W1

Re: Hopes Cradle

Dear Chief Johnson,

I want to say Miigwetch for meeting with Nogdawindamin Family & Community Services to provide input into the possible establishment of Hope's Cradle in Sault Ste. Marie. We are aware of Hope's Cradle and that it would provide anonymity for the mother to surrender her baby.

During our discussion, our agency shared concerns about implementing this program. As mentioned, we would be very concerned that these babies could have Indigenous Heritage, and Hope's Cradle would not allow a child to access important information about their heritage. We explained that historically, many Indigenous children were impacted by systems such as the 60's scoop, where children were adopted by many non-Indigenous families, and therefore, these children lost their connection to family, community and culture. This loss impacts a child's well-being and has detrimental impacts on a child's well-being.

As mentioned in our meeting, Nogdawindamin would not support the establishment of Hope's Cradle and would recommend that the city consult with the 7 North Shore Communities and other Indigenous Agencies in Sault Ste. Marie for further feedback.

Miigwetch,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Kennedy".

Karen Kennedy,
A/ Chief Executive Officer



May 30, 2025

Peter Johnson, CMM III, Fire Chief
Sault Ste. Marie Fire Services
72 Tancred St. P6A 2W1
Email: p.johnson@cityssm.on.ca

Dear Peter:

Thank you for sharing time and meeting with me last month to discuss the Hope's Cradle initiative. We would like to take a moment to applaud your effort in exploring alternate means to support birth parents and their children. While we understand the intent of the program is to provide an anonymous avenue for a parent(s) to safely relinquish their child, we are also aware that the program contradicts legislation currently laid out in *the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)*. The Act speaks directly to implementing prevention, early intervention and community support services for children and their families. The premise of Hope's Cradle makes it so that these guidelines would not be achievable. In short, the Adoption Council of Ontario could not support an initiative that contradicts the CYFSA. However, if further information is presented that would change the premise of the conversation, we would be happy to explore this further at that time.

If there are any future opportunities for the ACO to provide support, education or outreach to your staff or families in your community, please let us know. We strive to educate the public about adoption, connect, support and advocate families and children touched by adoption.

If we can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out. Our office is open from Monday – Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Shaw', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kaitlyn Shaw, B.S.W.
Centralized Adoption Intake
Services Manager (Interim)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Moore', with 'RSW' written in smaller letters to the right.

Karen Moore, MA (Leadership), BSDS, ECE, RSW
Executive Director



Kate Kirkham
Chief, Paramedic Services
DSSMSSAB

June 23, 2025

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,



Kate Kirkham
Chief of Paramedic Services

Rachel Tyczinski

Subject: FW: Hope's Cradle Support - Please share with council

From: Jill W.

Sent: Sunday, June 22, 2025 5:59 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@cityssm.on.ca>

Subject: Hope's Cradle Support - Please share with council

Hello,

I'm writing to voice my support for Hope's Cradle here in SSM as a local resident and taxpayer.

It should be voted on by council and voted in favor for its ability to save the lives of our most innocent: newborn babies.

Mothers who are facing homelessness, addiction, sex trafficking, or an unknown/unwanted teen pregnancy--all of which are occurring at high rates in our city--deserve a safe, anonymous way to surrender an infant.

The agencies meant to support this are not enough to prevent these innocent infant deaths because their processes are not healthy/bias-free, timely, or--in the case that the police/hospital are involved--safe from a prosecution. (Which is such a disgusting thing to even consider for such marginalized groups.)

As a concerned female citizen, I hope others will use their common sense and morals to see how this only supports our most vulnerable. To argue against this means you'd prefer harm and/or death come to innocent lives *first* before preventing it. Red tape and "a lack of research/numbers" are poor excuses in the face of being able to save even a few innocent, new lives locally.

Please vote wisely, as this policy benefits our community, being of our women, and our children.

-Jillian Wood

Rachel Tyczinski

Subject: FW: Hope's Cradle in SSM

-----Original Message-----

From: Kirsten Duke

Sent: Sunday, June 22, 2025 3:58 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@cityssm.on.ca>

Subject: Hope's Cradle in SSM

Good afternoon,

Please forward my email below to all city councillors in advance of tomorrow's City Council meeting.

Councillors.

I hate to be here again. To be reminding you that investments in preventative public health measures, in the case of Hope's Cradle, that can keep babies alive. The relative cost to even an implied impact is immeasurable.

But that's it right? You're spending money that you aren't certain will have a return on investment. Does that sound familiar? The Honourable Mayor sat in front of you all last month explaining why Councils need to be arms length from a police budget. In effect, that you can't be guaranteed a return on investment.

The same logic applies here. If you think harm reduction from a police force works, then investments in other preventative public health measures shouldn't be difficult to understand. In fact, it almost seems like a no brainer in that context.

You never ever want to have something like Hope's Cradle to be used. But, we are also all aware changes are coming swiftly to our community, whether we like it or not. Tariffs, international wars, they will impact the financial roots of our community, and we may find ourselves in need of these supports far sooner than any of us would like.

I really would appeal to each of you to consider the long term impacts of this initiative, and in light of the local letters to the opposite recommendation, that you broaden the net and actually consider the other recorded, actual evidence that exists that support Hope's Cradle. Our community is just as proud as it is stubborn, and our systems and agencies reflect that.

You've all been capable of big, important decisions before. And I hope you will continue in that direction.

Kirsten Duke
Ward 2

Rachel Tyczinski

Subject: FW: Please forward to all counsel. Re: Hope's Cradle

From: Katie Marchese

Sent: Monday, June 23, 2025 11:36 AM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@cityssm.on.ca>

Subject: Fwd: Please forward to all counsel. Re: Hope's Cradle

Good day,

I'm writing this as a letter of support for the Hope's Cradle project.

Counsellor Caputo is absolutely correct that our city needs one. As the mom of an adopted child, I too know the hoops that people need to go through to complete the process. It can take years, and leads to undue stress as paperwork is completed, for the adoption of a child who was given up at birth. The stress on the adoptive parents can affect the child in their care, and the stress on the biological family can increase drug use or depression. Everyone's story is different, but please please consider the benefit for the future children of SSM. Nogdawindamin's argument that a child could lose their connection to community and culture comes from a place of caring, I'm sure. A child's heritage may be temporarily unknown if they are surrendered, but isn't that better than being dead? Ancestry DNA and other tools can help.

With our opioid crisis, do you really think someone who is strung out and used to being looked over, is going to feel comfortable approaching an authority figure for help? They fear instant judgement and rejection. Same goes for a young teen mom, and countless others. A Hope's Cradle would allow them to make a choice, and not to feel any stigma by those in authority.

Please, please, pass the motion and allow Sault Ste Marie to move forward with this wonderful project. Worst case scenario it's approved and never used. Imagine its not approved though, and we hear the tragic news of an infants body found in a dumpster or a snow bank somewhere. Choose life. Choose a choice for the forgotten, that can save the innocent.

Thank you,

Katie Marchese