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May 9, 2023

Mayor Sandra Masters, City of Regina
Councillor Cheryl Stadnichuk
Councillor Bob Hawkins
Councillor Andrew Stevens
Councillor Lori Bresciani
Councillor John Findura
Councillor Daniel LeBlanc
Councillor Terina Nelson
Councillor Shanon Zachidniak
Councillor Jason Mancinelli
Councillor Landon Mohl

Dear Mayor Masters and Regina City Council,

On Thursday, March 16, 2023, Experience Regina unveiled its new tourism brand at an event attended by members of the Regina business community, government officials, and the public. However, the new branding has been met with criticism and disbelief from the Regina and the wider Saskatchewan community.

SASS is deeply concerned that a government body, using public funds, has endorsed a tourism marketing campaign that is built on disrespectful and harmful language, perpetuating a culture of harassment and abuse against women.

Rather than making the City of Regina stand out, this branding has shone a light on a troubling reality. Among Canadian provinces, Saskatchewan has the highest rates of interpersonal violence, with 104 sexual violence incidents per 100,000 and 655 intimate partner violence incidents per 100,000, double the national average. Additionally, police-reported sexual violence reports have risen by over 70 per cent in Regina since 2012. In 2022 alone, a record number of sexual assault reports were made to the Regina Police Service, averaging one sexual assault every second day.

Since the campaign launch, survivors have been reaching out to SASS, sexual assault crisis lines, and other supportive community agencies to assist with the retraumatization this campaign, and what its messaging has caused.

This campaign has yet again exposed that the attitudes and beliefs that enable violence against women and girls are pervasive across all levels of society, including government officials, business leaders, and those entrusted with the community's best interests.

In November 2021, the City of Regina released a Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB) Plan, which identified six priorities for immediate action. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence were

identified as the top priority for action by residents during the community safety assessment, especially considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Summit was held in May 2022 to facilitate community collaboration in addressing this critical issue, with one of the objectives being to "shift our community to be one of collective care and responsibility."

Unfortunately, the actions of Tourism Regina/Experience Regina directly contradict the values and vision outlined in the CSWB Plan and the community Summit. Either Mayor Masters, City Council, and the Regina Exhibition Association Limited (REAL) leadership team released the new branding without proper review of its messaging, or they failed to identify the problematic language within the campaign.

This demonstrates that the flawed campaign is not solely the result of one individual's poor decisions. Rather, the Experience Regina brand and campaign were enabled and encouraged by many individuals, organizations, and sectors, including City leadership. REAL has announced plans for a third-party review, and while SASS looks forward to the report, we believe that Mayor Masters and City Council must take action now.

It is crucial to hold those responsible for creating and approving such campaigns accountable and to work towards more responsible and respectful marketing practices. Education on the impact of actions and words on others should also continue, as we strive to create a more inclusive and equitable society for everyone, as identified by the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

We call on the City Leadership to provide a space for the Regina Community to share their thoughts through a Town Hall Meeting. We do not have to wait for a third-party report in order to start meaningful conversations now.

This is a teachable moment. There is much work to be done to make this right.

It is a time for reflection and change. There is always room to grow, and there is always hope. Now is the time to grow and be better, and to do better.

Regina, the Province, and all its residents deserve better.

Sincerely,

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan and member agencies:

- Envision Counselling & Support Centre Inc.
- Hope Restored
- Heart-Song Complex Trauma Program
- PARTNERS Family Services
- Piwapan Women's Centre
- Prince Albert Mobile Crisis Unit, Sexual Assault Centre
- Saskatoon Sexual Health
- Southwest Crisis Services (SWCS)
- West Central Crisis & Family Support Centre