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For immediate release

May 9, 2023

## **Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan asks city for action on Experience Regina**

On May 9, 2023, Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan (SASS) and member agencies sent a letter to Regina Mayor Sandra Masters and Regina City Council outlining concerns about the recent Experience Regina brand launch and subsequent fallout.

"We are concerned that a municipal government and one of its agencies approved a tourism marketing campaign founded on harmful language that perpetuates a culture of harassment and abuse against women," said Kerrie Isaac, executive director at SASS. "Furthermore, beyond a short apology of sorts and cancellation of the brand weeks after the backlash, no one has yet to come forward and explain how the brand was ever approved in the first place. There has been zero accountability thus far."

The Experience Regina brand is also more than a tasteless joke. It has shone a light on a troubling reality in the city and our province. 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. As well, 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.

Ever since Experience Regina launch, survivors have been reaching out to SASS, sexual assault crisis lines, and other supportive community agencies for help due to retraumatization from the campaign, and its messaging. This campaign has shown again that the attitudes and beliefs that enable violence against women and girls are pervasive.

"The City of Regina, Regina Exhibition Association Limited, Tourism Regina and others involved in the brand need to be transparent with the public about how this brand was developed," said Isaac. "A town hall meeting would allow residents and those impacted by the brand to express their concerns. We know a third-party report is underway, but that should not stop important conversations and learning from happening now. This is a teachable moment that can't be lost in the shuffle. Real harm happened because of this, and accountability is required."

The letter sent to Mayor Masters and City Council members is attached.

*Established in 1984, SASS is a provincial non-profit organization that works collectively with front-line agencies, community partners, and governments that provide support and advocacy for those affected by sexual violence in Saskatchewan. SASS fosters the coordination and collaboration amongst front-line agencies, community partners, and governments to support those affected by sexual violence.*

*SASS 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

-30-

For More Information:

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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
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