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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

It's time to put sexual violence on the agenda: Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan (SASS) urges provincial leaders to prioritize sexual violence prevention and support

October 22, 2024 (Regina, Sask.) — As Saskatchewan approaches the final days of its provincial election campaign, Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan (SASS) calls on officials and those seeking offices to prioritize sexual violence in their agendas. With Saskatchewan reporting the second-highest rate of sexual violence among Canadian provinces — 39 per cent higher than Alberta and 48 per cent higher than British Columbia — there is an urgent need for dedicated policy, support, and prevention strategies.

“Sexual violence is a significant drain on our economy,” said Kerrie Isaac, executive director at SASS. “It is a known risk factor for other costly social issues such as addictions, mental illness, homelessness, and family violence. Ignoring the long-term costs of sexual violence is bad business for our province.”

The 2023 National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence offers real hope and the opportunity for meaningful change. In July 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan signed a \$20.3 million agreement with the federal government, matched by the province, for a total of \$40.6 million over four years to address gender-based violence. However, less than \$5 million has been allocated to directly address sexual violence, despite Saskatchewan’s disproportionately high rates.

“Sexual violence is a distinct form of gender-based violence that require targeted and coordinated response province-wide. We are deeply concerned about the lack of community consultation and insufficient funding set aside for this issue,” said Isaac.

SASS has highlighted three key areas where immediate action is needed:

Priority 1: Comprehensive trauma-informed counselling services across Saskatchewan

Survivors across Saskatchewan have identified that long-term, trauma-informed, and specialized counselling is essential to their healing. However, many regions across the province lack access to these services. Without sufficient support, survivors are left to cope with the long-term effects of trauma alone.

Priority 2: Education for Saskatchewan students on recognizing sexual abuse and getting help

Education on healthy relationships is essential in helping students recognize sexual abuse and understand how to seek help. However, on August 22, 2023, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education removed the ability of SASS member agencies and other community educators to provide healthy relationship education in public schools. This decision puts students at risk, particularly those in unsafe situations, who may not be able to identify sexual abuse or know how to seek help — especially when the abuse is occurring in their own homes. Every student, no matter where they live, deserves access to the vital information and support they need to stay safe.

Priority 3: Access to specialized medical care for survivors in rural and remote communities

Survivors need timely access to compassionate, culturally responsive healthcare. Currently, there are no provincial standards of care for sexual assault survivors in emergency medical facilities, and many rural hospitals lack the capacity for referrals and follow-up support. These barriers to care must change so that survivors can cope with the effects of trauma and live long, healthy, and productive lives.

“We have a real opportunity to change the trajectory of sexual violence in Saskatchewan,” said Isaac. “It will take a concerted effort and investment, but the cost of doing nothing is far greater.”

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan (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.

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