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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



SOUTH NIAGARA MAYORS MEET WITH HEALTH MINISTER TO DISCUSS WELLAND HOSPITAL

Welland Mayor Frank Champion, Port Colborne Mayor John Maloney, Wainfleet Mayor April Jeffs and CAO Michael Smith, and Cindy Forster MPP, met with Health Minister Eric Hoskins last Wednesday to discuss keeping the Welland Hospital open as one of three hospitals serving Niagara.

The southern tier Mayors and MPP Forster met with Minister Hoskins on February 22nd and he agreed to meet with them again to hear a more detailed presentation. Dr. Kevin Smith issued a report on behalf of the Niagara Health System (NHS) in September 2012 that recommended the construction of a new hospital in Niagara Falls, closing the Welland Hospital and converting it to an Urgent Care Centre (UCC).

At last week's meeting, Minister Hoskins indicated that no decisions have been made regarding hospital restructuring and thus the Mayors' presentation was timely. He also indicated that he doesn't want to see any movement of health care services within the NHS until final decisions have been made. Minister Hoskins left the door open for the Mayors and Ms. Forster to have further discussions directly with his Ministry officials.

"Given Niagara's population, there should be three hospitals and it makes sense for Welland to continue to be the hospital in south Niagara as that's what residents are used to," said Welland Mayor Frank Champion. "South Niagarans deserve equitable, timely access to elective and emergency services. We put forward cost effective solutions and innovative ideas to strengthen the Welland Hospital within the Niagara Health System. We had a positive meeting with Minister Hoskins and asked him to extend every consideration to our request."

"I'm pleased we had such a positive meeting with the Minister that included thoughtful discussion about the health care needs of South Niagara. I look forward to continued dialogue with his office," said April Jeffs, Mayor of Wainfleet.

City of Port Colborne Mayor, John Maloney said, "Our meeting with the Minister and his staff was open and very positive. Coming from Simcoe, a small community down Highway #3, he was appreciative of the concerns of our residents. The Minister was familiar with the file and left the door open for more discussion."

MPP Cindy Forster stated "It became clear during the meeting with Minister Hoskins that no decisions have been made with respect to further hospital closures proposed by the NHS in Niagara. A planning process is underway at stage one of five and nothing is carved in stone. I will continue to work with the mayors to keep equitable and timely access to hospital services and care for our residents in the Welland catchment area. The minister said there should be no further cuts of services during this planning process."

The Welland Hospital serves a catchment area of 135,000 and south Niagara is expected to continue to grow as outlined in the Niagara 2041 Growth Strategy.

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