[Parish name and address or letterhead]

[Date]

[Name and address of MPP(s)]

Dear [name]

We are writing to you as members of [name of parish] to express our support for supervised consumption sites in the province of Ontario. We urge the provincial government to reverse the planned closure of ten existing sites and to lift the ban on new sites, in order to extend these life-saving harm reduction services to Ontarians.

Ontario is in the grip of a deadly overdose crisis which claims more than seven lives every day. This figure would be far worse without the dedicated work of supervised consumption sites, which have reversed over 21,000 overdoses between March 2000 and January 2024 alone. These sites offer a clean, indoor space for people who use drugs to do so safely, with trained staff on hand to reverse overdoses quickly. They also offer sterile equipment and needle exchange, which has been recognized for decades as medical best practice to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and other blood borne diseases. Staff at these sites also address other health issues and connect clients to other supports, including housing and addictions treatment.

While people naturally have concerns about safety in the neighbourhoods surrounding the sites, analysis of data from homicide reports and the Toronto Police Service has shown a significant decrease in homicides, assaults and robberies in neighbourhoods with supervised consumption sites since the sites opened, while neighbourhoods without sites either showed no decline or a slight increase. Furthermore, studies show that supervised consumption sites are associated with a 50% decrease in public injecting and a reduction of discarded needles and other drug paraphernalia in public spaces. Without supervised consumption sites, these neighbourhoods will see more public drug use, more discarded needles in public spaces, more blood-borne disease from the sharing of needles; and more likelihood of people overdosing and dying in public. This does not keep anyone safe.

Moreover, by responding to overdoses quickly, supervised consumption sites reduce the strain on first responders and emergency services, saving taxpayer dollars. Without these sites, demand for ambulances and emergency rooms will only increase, leading to longer wait times for anyone who needs emergency medical treatment.

We welcome increased provincial investment in addictions treatment and mental health. At the same time, supervised consumption sites are an important component of healthcare for people who use drugs. By keeping people alive, and providing a place where people can not only use drugs but access other supports without stigma, supervised consumption sites help people get to a place where they can choose recovery, or at least reduce their drug use and other risky behaviours. Statistics show that people who regularly use supervised consumption sites are nearly twice as likely to enroll in addictions treatment. Harm reduction and access to treatment thus go hand in hand as part of a comprehensive public health strategy.

We are concerned that the legislation closing these sites was passed without opportunity for committee review or public consultation, against the advice of the province’s own commissioned experts and multiple health-care and drug policy reports. On the day after Bill 223 was passed, the Auditor-General released a report criticizing the provincial government for its outdated opioid strategy, for failing to provide an evidence-based case analysis for their proposed HART hub model, and failing to mitigate the adverse impacts which will result from closing supervised consumption sites.

We believe people in our communities will suffer and die as a result of this decision – not only people who use drugs, some of whom may be friends and family members, but also children who will be more likely to encounter drug use, discarded needles, and individuals suffering overdoses in parks and other public spaces, as well as all of us who may require access to emergency medical services.

On [date] our parish passed a motion urging this government to reverse the planned closure of safe consumption sites in Ontario, and to lift the ban on the creation of new sites, in order to expand life-saving harm reduction services to Ontarians.

We welcome the opportunity to hear from you on this urgent matter.

Yours faithfully,

[names, parish]