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Dear Minister Hoskins,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Patients First proposal. We applaud the government's move to put patients at the centre of health care in Ontario. In particular, we understand the need to change how home care is delivered to meet the growing needs of our aging population and for better integration with primary care. As clinicians who work with children and youth who require school health support services, we want to ensure their needs are not forgotten in the process of change.

Our organization, PONDA, is a network of community and academic physicians including researchers, developmental specialists, neurologists and paediatricians from across Ontario. Our mission is to improve the lives of individuals experiencing differences in their development. Our members are clinicians who see first hand the struggles children and their families experience navigating a confusing system of services and supports. As an advocacy group, we want to be a resource to government to help inform policy based on research evidence and our collective experience.

Children with special needs require assessment and intervention by professionals such as occupational and physical therapists, nurses and dieticians to be able to fully participate in their education. Under the current home-care system, this is managed by CCAC. School Health Support Services enable children and youth with special needs to fully participate in and benefit from integration in school. Without these supports, children will fall further behind academically, may experience secondary behavioural and mental health problems, and in some cases, may not be able to attend school at all. The review of School Health Support Services by Deloitte in 2010 outlined many reasons why change is needed. Many of their recommendations would be addressed by aligning this service with the Children's Treatment Centres of Ontario under the MCYS.

Your government has embarked on a bold proposal to improve care for children and youth with special needs under the Special Needs Strategy. We believe this strategy is going to make meaningful change to how services are delivered to these individuals and their families. To strengthen and complement this strategy, we propose that funding for the school support services portion of the home-care budget be transferred to MCYS. This action

would require no new spending on the part of your government and complements the Special Needs Strategy.

We would be happy to elaborate more on these suggestions during a personal meeting with you and your staff.

Thank you once again for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. Mesterman" followed by a horizontal line.

Dr. Ronit Mesterman
Chair of PONDA