

April 18, 2024

TO: Doug Ford, **Ontario Premier** (doug.ford@pc.ola.org)
Sylvia Jones, **Deputy Premier, Minister of Health** (Sylvia.Jones@pc.ola.org)
Michael Sherar, **President and CEO, Public Health Ontario** (president@oahpp.ca)

Dear Premier Ford, Minister Jones, and Mr. Sherar,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) regarding the Public Health Ontario Private Drinking Water Testing Program. As the CEO of FOCA, I appreciate the Minister clarifying the Province's stance in Question Period on April 16, responding to recent suggestions in the media about the potential discontinuation of this critical program.

FOCA represents the 250,000 Ontario families who own waterfront property across the province and has been at the forefront of advocating for strong policies to protect Ontario's valuable water sources since our founding in the 1960s. We believe that access to clean, safe drinking water is a fundamental right for all Ontarians, whether they rely on municipal systems, private wells, or surface water. The private drinking water testing program administered by Public Health Ontario plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety of drinking water for over 50% of residents in rural areas who depend on private wells.

When the Auditor General of Ontario's December 2023 "Value-for-Money Audit: Public Health Ontario" mentioned a Public Health Ontario proposal to gradually discontinue the private drinking water testing program, it raised serious concerns for us, and the recent media coverage has resulted in dozens of calls and emails to our office from concerned citizens across Ontario.

FOCA finds it difficult to understand how the province would even consider supporting such a plan, which could jeopardize the health of rural Ontarians. While we support efforts to enhance program efficiency, we firmly believe that discontinuing this program would be a step in the wrong direction. Instead, we urge the province to consider ways to strengthen and promote the program, including through appropriate funding, education and outreach initiatives, and continuation of free private drinking water testing for all Ontarians.

Ontario's economy benefits greatly from rural residents' contributions, and healthy residents are key to a strong economy. As FOCA's 2022 [Economic Impact Study](#) concluded, the quarter-million waterfront property households across rural Ontario spend an average \$11.44 billion annually, resulting in \$6.91 million in labour income and \$11.66 million in GDP generated by these dollars spent, and over 150,000 jobs across Ontario. Ensuring access to clean, safe drinking water is not just a public health issue, but also an economic imperative.

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In February 2022, the Province of Ontario released Best Practices for source water protection, a significant step forward. However, there are still considerable gaps in rural and remote source water protection that need to be addressed. These include:

1. Lack of comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanisms in rural and remote areas, leading to potential contamination risks going unnoticed.
2. Limited access to resources and funding for implementing and maintaining source water protection measures in these regions.
3. Insufficient education and outreach programs to raise awareness about the importance of source water protection among residents in rural and remote areas.

FOCA, along with others, has been calling for improvements to protect the drinking water of all Ontarians for decades, and posts related information here: <https://foca.on.ca/source-water-protection/>.

In conclusion, FOCA urges the Province of Ontario to maintain and promote the private drinking water testing program to ensure that all Ontarians have access to clean, safe drinking water.

We look forward to the Province's response on this matter, and to working with you to protect Ontario's water sources for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Lesley Lavender
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CC: [Andrea Khanjin](#), Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
[Lisa Thompson](#), Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
[Neil Lumsden](#), Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport
[Peter Bethlenfalvy](#), Minister of Finance
[Vic Fedeli](#), Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
[Greg Rickford](#), Minister of Northern Development, Minister of Indigenous Affairs