

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning to the COVID-19 response and how in particular it affected and continues to affect my riding of York South-Weston.

It has been said that your postal code matters as much as your genetic code when it comes to being hit by COVID-19.

Dr. Theresa Tam suggested that “where you live...or where you don’t have a home is a critical factor affecting health.

Dr. Tam’s recent report on COVID pointed out that communities like mine where lower-income and racialized workers often don’t have the luxury of working from home are at a much higher risk.

York South—Weston is home to many front line, essential workers.

PSW’s, Nurses, Cleaners, Service and Transit Workers are those we have relied on to continue working throughout the pandemic.

Those workers along with socially and economically disadvantaged groups, seniors, women, and disabled people are bearing the full brunt of the pandemic.

It takes all three levels of government working in coordination with each other to effectively protect citizens and deal safely with this pandemic.

I thank Toronto Public Health for the facing the challenging task of navigating this crisis and trying to work with provincial and federal levels to meet the needs of communities.

As a provincial MPP my office has been hearing the troubling stories of community members and businesses struggling through the COVID pandemic.

Our office has tried to assist the best we can and as an MPP I have been advocating for the changes I believe have been needed.

That requires communicating concerns with the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government.

Many lessons have been learned and the work continues as clearly we are in the middle of a devastating second wave with record covid case numbers being recorded.

I would like to touch on some of the difficulties my community has faced.

The return to school plan by the provincial government was very poorly planned out and September seemed to arrive as a surprise to them.

Despite community and Official Opposition calls for smaller class sizes were ignored.

We have classes with 25 and 30 children crammed in to older schools with improper ventilation.

The state of many schools were already in disrepair from years of neglect in funding by this and previous governments.

Case numbers are high nonetheless and York South—Weston had the unfortunate status of having one of the first school covid outbreaks in the GTA.

Schools continue to be a source of outbreak with staff and students affected. The needed investment in proper ventilation in many cases has simply not happened.

When it comes to flattening the covid curve the need for accessible and convenient testing is an obvious one.

Despite frequent requests I made to the Health Minister and Premier for the need for covid testing in my community, incredibly...my high risk community only received its first testing facility on September 28<sup>th</sup>. And so far there has only been 3 pop up testing sites. We need more and we urgently establish partnerships with community groups and find suitable public testing sites.

My office had over 30 people contact us saying after in some cases two weeks later their test results were not available.

This put people's lives on hold and in many situations they couldn't just stay home unpaid waiting for results.

The unacceptable delays also made the results somewhat useless as they were too old.

Over 125 patients were left in the terrible situation of testing delays.

I am proud of my office for doing the outreach necessary to assist so many individual in obtaining their results and drawing attention to this outrage.

Communities like York South—Weston and other hot spots need priority testing facilities including adequate pop ups to provide the monitoring and data collection needed to both provide peace of mind to citizens and to help stop the spread of Covid.

An outreach strategy for community members with language or cultural barriers must be made so ALL in our community are aware of testing availability and safe practices and very importantly the mental health support needed for coping with Covid.

There are many community groups doing this valuable work with so little.

They need public partnership support to help them do their work that is so needed.

It is the on the ground community agencies that have already established connections with a wide range of community members.

Their skills and abilities must be supported.

COVID-19 has put an enormous strain on people and mental health support is very urgently needed.

The provincial government is putting Ontario on the brink of another health and economic disaster all the while that the provincial government is currently sitting on 9.3 Billion dollars of federal money specifically earmarked to combat the pandemic.

That money could save seniors in long term care and boost COVID testing and contact tracing. And it could make schools safer with smaller classes.

I call on the provincial government to spend that money on Covid and the federal and municipal governments should be encouraging the same.

We are facing a bigger battle than this spring and it takes all hands on deck to face this pandemic. Our communities deserve no less.