



DISTRICT OF RAINY RIVER SERVICES BOARD

Media Release

Delegations Brought Forward at ROMA

Fort Frances, Ontario – 2025/01/28 – The District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB) was represented at the 2025 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference in Toronto from January 19 to 21 by Board Chair, Debbie Ewald, Board member, Mike Ford and CAO Charene Gillies.

With the DRRSB delivering services such as Early Learning and Child Care, Ontario Works, Community Housing, and Paramedic Services within the Rainy River District, the delegates brought forward five community issues and key priorities to lobby for action and/or funding, while also supporting five delegations by Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA).

The DRRSB team met with the following leaders to address their priorities:

- **Andrea Khanjin, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks:** The team discussed the financial and operational impact of drinking water requirements on Morley Municipal Housing Corporation (MMHC), a small rural non-profit housing provider. Following a February 2024 inspection, the Ministry mandated the use of certified operators for water testing. This forced MMHC to contract the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA), increasing annual costs from \$8,665 in 2023 to \$67,350 in 2024. Together with MMHC, DRRSB called for collaboration on solutions to alleviate the severe financial burden while ensuring compliance and safe drinking water for residents.
- **Chief of Staff Blair Haines and Deputy Minister Deborah Richardson, Ministry of Health:** The team advocated for support for an integrated patient transportation system, including a medically stable patient transport program. This initiative aims to provide equitable access to health care for residents across the Rainy River District.
- **Matthew Rae, Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs and Housing:** The team highlighted the critical and escalating costs faced by the DRRSB and its municipalities related to aging infrastructure, rising operational costs, and the increasing complexity of tenant needs. They requested targeted provincial support to help address these issues and ensure sustainable operations.

- Sarah Caldwell, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Division, Ministry of the Solicitor General: The team raised concerns about the impact of criminal activity in community housing. They requested targeted funding to enhance security measures and for resources to support tenant education and community programs aimed at reducing crime and promoting safety. Additionally, they urged the Ministry to collaborate with impacted partners to develop a provincial framework addressing safety challenges in community housing.
- Honourable Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education: The team sought support to address the shortage of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in the Rainy River District. They called for targeted funding and policy support to enable retention bonuses, housing supports for RECEs in underserved areas, professional development tailored to northern communities, and bridge funding to maintain facility operations during recruitment. These measures aim to meet childcare needs while supporting provincial expansion goals.

"Connecting with provincial leaders is an invaluable opportunity to bring attention to the unique challenges facing our district," said Ewald. "These discussions allow us to address pressing local issues while working toward meaningful solutions that benefit our communities. Being part of a strong, unified rural voice ensures our advocacy is both strategic and impactful."

The annual ROMA conference provides a pivotal platform for municipal and provincial officials to unite over the distinctive challenges encountered by rural and northern municipalities. It offers a chance to highlight municipal priorities and showcase active engagement and advocacy for local needs.

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