AORS
PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE. PURSUING EXCELLENCE.

October 15, 2026

The Honourable Trevor Jones
Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
Via Email

Dear Minister Jones:

Re: Protecting Ontario's Municipal Public Works Professionals from Harassment, Threats and Interference

We are writing on behalf of the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors (AORS) to follow up on discussions we had with provincial ministries earlier this year regarding the growing concern of harassment, threats and interference directed at municipal public works professionals while they are carrying out essential public services.

When we first raised this issue with the Province in early 2026, we were asked important questions: Where is this happening? When is it happening? And what exactly are municipal public works professionals experiencing?

We took that request seriously.

AORS subsequently launched a province-wide survey of our municipal public works membership to obtain direct feedback from the people who are experiencing these situations firsthand. The results provide a concerning picture of a problem that is occurring across Ontario and across many different types of municipal operations.

The findings are clear: harassment, threats and interference have become far too common in municipal public works - and, perhaps most concerning, too many workers have come to believe that this behaviour is simply "part of the job."

It should never be.

What Municipal Public Works Professionals Are Experiencing

90.3% of respondents reported that they or their staff have experienced harassment, threats or interference from the public while performing their municipal duties.

These experiences range from verbal abuse and intimidation to conduct that places workers and members of the public in immediate physical danger.

Among respondents who reported experiencing these incidents:

- **95.6%** reported verbal harassment, yelling or threats of violence;
- **69.2%** reported confrontational filming or photography;
- **65.4%** reported online harassment, social media targeting, phone calls or voicemails;
- **61.0%** reported physical interference, including people blocking equipment or standing in front of vehicles;
- **54.7%** reported aggressive honking or revving;
- **45.9%** reported intentional swerving, driving too close or tailgating;
- **49.7%** reported physical violence or objects being thrown at personnel or equipment; and
- **35.8%** reported being followed or experiencing stalking behaviour.

This is not limited to one region or one type of municipality. Respondents from Northern, Central, Eastern and Western Ontario, as well as the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, reported these experiences. The issue is also present in rural, urban and mixed rural/urban communities.

Winter Operations Are a Particular Concern

The survey reinforces what our members have been telling us for years: winter maintenance is one of the most challenging environments in which this behaviour occurs.

56.0% of respondents said incidents had specifically affected winter maintenance operations.

Among respondents who had experienced harassment, threats or interference, 91.8% identified winter plowing, salting or sidewalk maintenance as a setting where incidents occur.

Operators are being confronted while operating heavy equipment, often during snowstorms, overnight operations, poor visibility and difficult road conditions. These are circumstances where an operator's full attention must be on safely operating their equipment and protecting other road users.

Yet respondents described residents standing in front of plows, blocking equipment with vehicles, following operators, driving aggressively around equipment, entering work zones and confronting workers over snow placement or other operational decisions.

The Province's Minimum Maintenance Standards already recognize that a significant weather event is a circumstance in which municipalities must adjust how they deploy resources and respond to hazardous conditions.

Our members are asking that the Province similarly recognize the extraordinary conditions under which the people carrying out this work are operating.

The Extreme Examples

While many incidents involve verbal abuse or intimidation, the survey also produced examples that cannot reasonably be characterized as simple disagreements between residents and municipal employees.

Respondents reported workers being punched, knocked down, spit on and struck with shovels or other objects.

One respondent described a worker conducting a tree assessment being asked by a homeowner whether getting a shotgun would change the worker's decision. The same comment was reportedly made to a contractor at the same location. Police became involved.

Another described a traffic-control worker being struck twice by a vehicle while flagging for a contractor, resulting in the worker being off work with back issues. Police attended but charges were never laid.

Respondents described plow operators being followed into municipal yards and assaulted, workers being followed and blocked in so residents could confront them, and individuals deliberately entering closed work zones.

There were reports of people standing directly in front of snowplows, climbing onto equipment, entering equipment cabs and, in one case, grabbing an operator's steering wheel.

One respondent described a resident coming to a worker's home to issue threats, including threats made in front of the worker's children.

These are not disagreements about municipal service.

These are worker safety issues.

And they are public safety issues.

The Problem Is Bigger Than The Extreme Cases

Perhaps the most important finding from our survey is that the extreme incidents do not exist in isolation.

85.2% of respondents said they or their co-workers have experienced behaviour that felt “minor” at the time but was still distracting, intimidating or stressful.

These incidents frequently go unreported.

Why? Because workers have been conditioned to believe that being yelled at, sworn at, threatened, followed, filmed, intimidated or confronted is simply **“part of the job.”**

That perception is reflected directly in our survey. 75.6% of respondents believe this type of behaviour is normalized to at least a moderate extent as part of municipal public works.

Minister, abuse is not part of the job. Harassment is not part of the job. Threats are not part of the job. Physical interference is not part of the job.

A person does not surrender their right to a safe workplace simply because their workplace happens to be a snowplow, grader, sidewalk machine or municipal truck.

The Consequences Extend Beyond The Individual Worker

This issue is also affecting municipalities' ability to deliver essential public services.

Among respondents who experienced incidents:

- **67.3%** reported work delays or route/service disruptions;
- **62.9%** reported requiring supervisor or by-law intervention;
- **45.9%** reported workers feeling unsafe, refusing or being unable to continue work, or work stoppages;
- **44.7%** reported police involvement;
- **36.5%** reported staff requesting reassignment or refusing to work; and
- **32.1%** reported difficulty attracting or retaining staff.

This means public interference can directly affect the municipality's ability to keep roads open, clear snow, maintain infrastructure and provide essential services.

There is an important distinction here: ***protecting municipal workers is also protecting the public.***

When an operator is forced to stop work because they are being threatened or physically interfered with, the consequences do not end with that employee. A road may remain uncleared. A work zone may remain active. A hazard may remain on the roadway. A critical piece of infrastructure may remain inaccessible.

We Need A Legislative Response

AORS believes the Province now has the evidence it asked us to provide.

We respectfully ask the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to work with AORS and other municipal stakeholders to develop stronger legislative protections for municipal public works professionals and subcontractors performing municipal work.

At a minimum, we believe the Province should examine:

1. **Stronger legal protections against interference with municipal workers and equipment**, including conduct that obstructs, blocks, threatens, intimidates or physically interferes with the performance of essential municipal work.
2. **Clearer enforcement mechanisms and direction to police services** when workers are threatened, assaulted, followed, obstructed or placed in danger while performing municipal duties.
3. **Protections that extend to municipal subcontractors and contractors** performing essential municipal work. A worker should not lose protection simply because their employer is a private company working on behalf of a municipality.
4. **Recognition of repeated low-level harassment and intimidation** as a legitimate workplace safety concern, rather than requiring behaviour to escalate to physical violence before meaningful intervention occurs.
5. **Public education and awareness initiatives** that make it clear that interfering with municipal equipment and personnel is dangerous - not only for the worker, but for the individual engaging in the interference and for the broader public.

Emergency Protections For Municipal Public Works Personnel

We also believe there is an important gap that needs to be addressed when municipalities are responding to extraordinary circumstances.

When a municipality declares a significant weather event under the Minimum Maintenance Standards, municipal public works professionals are often working in conditions where normal service expectations cannot reasonably be achieved. The existing regulation recognizes this by allowing municipalities to monitor conditions and deploy resources when practicable during the event.

Similarly, when a municipality declares a state of emergency because public safety or critical infrastructure is at risk, public works personnel can be among the first people required to respond.

These workers are operating heavy equipment, clearing emergency routes, addressing flooding, removing debris, restoring access, maintaining critical transportation routes and protecting infrastructure that communities depend upon.

We believe that when these circumstances occur, municipal public works professionals and the equipment they operate should be recognized as emergency-response resources and afforded enhanced legal protections.

Specifically, AORS is asking the Province to explore legislative amendments that would provide municipal public works professionals - and subcontractors performing designated emergency municipal work - with protections comparable to those provided when police officers, firefighters and paramedics are carrying out emergency duties.

The principle is straightforward:

If the work is essential to protecting public safety during an emergency, the people performing that work should have meaningful legal protection from interference while doing it.

Police officers, firefighters and paramedics should never be expected to tolerate someone blocking, assaulting, threatening or deliberately interfering with their emergency response. We believe the same principle should apply to the municipal public works professionals who are clearing the road for those emergency responders, restoring access, removing hazards and keeping critical infrastructure functioning.

AORS Is Ready To Work With The Province

AORS represents municipal public works professionals across Ontario, and our members are proud of the work they do every day to keep our communities safe, connected and functioning.

They do not expect special treatment.

They expect the same fundamental protection that every worker should have: the ability to go to work and return home safely without being abused, threatened or physically interfered with.

The survey has provided the Province with the information requested: where these incidents are occurring, when they are occurring, what workers are experiencing and how those incidents affect both workers and municipal service delivery.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and Ministry officials to present the full survey findings and discuss how Ontario can move forward with meaningful legislative and policy changes.

Our members should not have to accept abuse as “part of the job.”

It isn't. And it shouldn't be.

Sincerely,

Cyrus Rife
President

Kelly Elliott
Executive Director

Association of Ontario Road Supervisors (AORS)

Cc:

Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Honourable David Piccini, Minister of Infrastructure

Honourable Prabmeet Sakaria, Minister of Transportation

Scott Butler, Executive Director, Good Roads

Walid Abou-Hamde, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Road Builders Association

Lindsay Jones, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Scott Vokey, Executive Director, Civic Ontario