



NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE

Police Service Board Report

PUBLIC AGENDA

Subject: Annual Report – Child Abuse and Neglect
January 1 to December 31, 2024

Report To: Chair and Members, Niagara Police Service Board

Report Date: 2025-02-25

Recommendation(s)

That the Niagara Police Service Board (Board) receive this report for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to advise the Board that the Niagara Regional Police Service (Service) is in compliance with By-Law 437-2024 – Child Abuse and Neglect.
- By-Law 437-2024 contains provisions requiring the Chief of Police to report specific information to ensure compliance with the legislative guidelines.
- This report is submitted to provide the Board with the necessary and required information pursuant to the operation of the Child Abuse Unit (CAU).

Financial Considerations

There are no financial implications relating to the recommendations contained within this report.

Analysis

In accordance with By-Law 437-2024, the Chief shall make a written report to the Board on or before August 30 of each year in respect of investigations into child abuse and neglect. The report shall include:

- a) a summary of the written procedures concerning investigations into child abuse and neglect;
- b) confirmation that the procedures and protocol are being complied with; and
- c) a summary of the training given to members regarding investigations into child abuse and neglect.

This Board Report will outline each of the above and confirm compliance with the By-Law.

The CAU is staffed by one detective sergeant and six detective constables who are responsible for investigating the following:

- Incidents of child abuse by a caregiver that have occurred in the Niagara Region;
- Incidents of child sexual abuse that have occurred in the Niagara Region;
- Cases of neglect where serious injuries have resulted, a life has been endangered or where there has been a failure to provide the necessities of life; and
- Attempted murder of a child by a person having charge, care, or authority over a child.

a) *"...a summary of the written procedures concerning investigations into child abuse and neglect..."*

General Order (GO) 084.08 – Child Abuse and Neglect was last revised in 2021 and is the primary GO related to this By-Law. The GO was authorized and has been fully implemented.

The Child Abuse Protocol (Protocol) is a procedural document that has been adopted by Family and Children Services (FACS), Ministry of the Attorney General for Niagara North and Niagara South, Victim/Witness Assistance Program (VWAP), and the Office of the Regional Coroner for Niagara. This Protocol serves as a strategy for the coordination of a multidisciplinary response to issues of child abuse and neglect and is included as an attachment to the Child Abuse and Neglect GO.

The Protocol has been updated to reflect changes to the Child, Youth, and Family Services Act (CYFSA). At the time of this report, a re-written version of the Protocol is being drafted as VWAP will be replaced by the Kristen French Child Advocacy Centre of Niagara (KFCACN) as the Victim Witness Program representative for young persons. At year end, the Protocol had not been finalized; the changes require further review by community partners and by the Service, prior to steps being taken to finalize the agreement. During 2024, child abuse and neglect investigations were still guided by the 2017 Protocol, and further by procedural amendments to the CYFSA, enacted in 2019 and 2020.

The Protocol contains guidelines that promote inter-agency cooperation and effective response.

b) *"...confirmation that the procedures and protocol are being complied with..."*

Investigations are conducted in accordance with GO 084.08, and the Protocol, and are compliant with procedures established in these documents. A positive working relationship exists between members of CAU and their counterparts at FACS. Issues with respect to the interpretation of the Protocol are resolved informally, usually to the mutual satisfaction of both agencies.

The KFCACN continues to support a multi-disciplinary team approach to investigations, and a child-friendly environment to conduct forensic interviews with child victims and witnesses. CAU investigators attend the Centre on an as-needed basis during joint investigations with the on-site team of FACS Niagara child protection workers. The Service provides partial funding on an annual basis toward the operating costs of the KFCACN.

The Child Abuse Review Team (CART), led by FACS, facilitates a coordinated multi-disciplinary review of child abuse and neglect issues, with representation from the Service, local school boards, medical staff, and mental health officials. The Detective Sergeant in charge of CAU is the Chair of CART.

In 2024, 273 incidents of child abuse or neglect were investigated by CAU. Investigators conducted 255 child interviews and laid 179 criminal charges in 61 incidents. Additionally, members of the unit reviewed and monitored referrals to and from FACS Niagara involving child welfare concerns in accordance with the Protocol. The CAU had grounds to lay criminal charges in at least 7 additional investigations in which extra judicial measures, community resources, or diversionary programs were utilized in lieu of criminal charges. The diversionary measures or extra judicial measures were primarily utilized in cases where the suspect was a young offender.

Year	Incidents Investigated	Child Interviews	Criminal Charges	Cleared by Charge
2022	291	270	151	57
2023	245	219	88	26
2024	273	255	179	61

In summary, the Service is in compliance with the written procedures outlined in the GO.

- c) *"...a summary of the training given to members regarding investigations into child abuse and neglect..."*

All members of the CAU are required by the Adequate and Effective Policing Regulations and the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, O. Reg. 87/24: Training, to obtain the following courses:

- Criminal Investigator Training;
- Ontario Major Case Management;
- Managing Investigations Using PowerCase;
- Sexual Assault Investigation;
- Investigating Offences Against Children;
- Investigative Interviewing Techniques; and
- Search Warrant Course.

New investigators assigned to the CAU are required to attend the above-noted training as soon as practicable; however, some courses are only offered once or twice a year and have prerequisite training. Accordingly, it can take more than a year for new investigators to become fully trained.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Police Service/Board Strategic Priorities

To comply with the provisions of Board By-Laws and to maintain compliance with the Adequate and Effective Policing requirements.

Relevant Policy Considerations

Board By-Law 437-2024 – Child Abuse and Neglect
GO 084.08 – Child Abuse and Neglect
Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, O. Reg. 87/24: Training

Other Pertinent Reports

8.8 – 2024.03.28 – Annual Report – Child Abuse and Neglect – January 1 to December 31, 2023

This report was prepared by Paul Koole, Detective Sergeant, Child Abuse Unit, in consultation with Martin Cook, Staff Sergeant, Special Victims Unit. Reviewed by Chris Lemaich, Inspector, Investigative Support and Dave Masotti, Superintendent, Investigative Services. Recommended by Mario Lagrotteria, Acting Deputy Chief, Community Services.



Submitted by:

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Chief of Police

Appendices

Not applicable.