



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

ADVOCACY BULLETIN AND ACTION ALERT!

September 11, 2024

This mailing will be of special interest to those concerned about loved ones living in long-term care facilities.

Letter to the Provincial Auditor - Southbridge Care Homes Inc. Contracts

Just over two weeks ago Seniors for Social Action (Ontario) wrote to the Provincial Auditor asking that she and her team review contracts provided to this company. The letter to the Auditor (below) is self-explanatory.

ACTION ALERT

Please write to the Provincial Auditor asking that she and her team review these contracts in the public interest.

Below is the letter template you can use and the e-mail address. You can simply copy and paste this letter, not this full Action Alert into your e-mail. Please write today or tomorrow. Your e-mail will have the most impact if sent within the next two days.

Please send to: comments@auditor.on.ca

Copy and paste only this letter in your e-mail:

Dear Ms Spence,

I am writing as a member of Seniors for Social Action (Ontario) in support of the Chair's request that you review the Ontario Government's award of contracts to Southbridge Care Homes Inc. as outlined in the letter to you.

As a citizen of Ontario, I am very concerned about conditions in long-term care facilities and how and why these lengthy license awards, redevelopment, and bed expansion contracts are being awarded.

Millions in public funding is being funneled to predominantly for-profit corporations through these contract awards, yet they are shrouded in secrecy. The government is withholding important information about them from SSAO and the public, including the criteria being used to assess these companies' track records, the internal decision making process to award the contracts, and the decisions behind the issuing of MZO's forcing municipalities to accept them. I would like to know who is responsible for these contract awards and for the decisions to invoke the MZO's.

For all of these reasons, I am requesting that you conduct a review of these contract awards, especially those to Southbridge Care Homes Inc. in the public interest.

Yours truly,

Add your Name, area of Ontario where you live, any other comments you wish to make and please copy seniorsactionontario@gmail.com

THIS IS THE LETTER THAT SSAO SENT TO THE PROVINCIAL AUDITOR

Ms Shelley Spence,
Auditor General of Ontario,

Dear Ms Spence,

I am writing on behalf of the 1500+ members of Seniors for Social Action (Ontario) – a non-profit, incorporated social advocacy organization in this province.

Refusal of Information Related to Southbridge Care Homes Inc. Licensure and Expansions in Ontario

Since November of 2023, this organization has been attempting to obtain information about the Ontario government's negotiations between itself, Yorkville Asset Management, and Southbridge Care Homes Inc. regarding the government's decision to grant a 30 year license to Orchard Villa in Pickering. We are attempting to obtain information about the criteria and process used to determine whether or not this license and significant bed expansion should have been approved and who approved it.

We have also been attempting to obtain any information about how and why the Ontario government imposed an MZO on the City of Pickering over the unanimous objection of that city's Council, local residents, and the families of the 78 who died and many more who were infected during the first COVID wave in 2020.

To date the government has refused to provide any information related to this contract and SSAO has been advised that the Commission Case Lead on this file is about to issue an order to the government to make a final decision regarding this matter. To date it has refused information based on Section 13 – Advice to Government, and Section 18 Economic and other interests of Ontario. It has also advised that "other exemptions may apply". The result is that for over 9 months, SSAO has been unable to obtain any information related to these contract awards in spite of millions in public funding being directed to this company.

Conditions at Orchard Villa and Southbridge's Track Record There

The situation at Orchard Villa was so severe that the Durham Medical Officer of Health issued an order that Southbridge and the management of Orchard Villa work with

Lakeridge Health in order to save lives. Even then the situation remained so severe that the Canadian military was called in and a report was later issued detailing horrendous care related and physical conditions in that facility. Families of the dead have filed lawsuits against the facility and the company.

In Port Hope, the company was so determined to force an expanded Southbridge facility on the town that when the town Council voted against it, the company took the town to the Ontario Land Tribunal where it subsequently lost.

There was significant citizen opposition to this company being able to build an expanded facility there and the Council represented the citizens. The Council stood firm in spite of Minister Calandra, the local PC MPP, a representative of Yorkville Asset Management and Southbridge meeting in camera with the Council attempting to “persuade” it to allow Southbridge to build.

When it refused, on June 9, 2023 the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued a Minister’s Zoning Order essentially forcing the town to allow Southbridge to build over the town and its citizens’ objections. The history of this is found here:

<https://www.porthope.ca/en/business-and-development/resources/Heritage%20Permits/Heritage%20Designations/OLT-23-000729-FEB-20-2024.pdf>

The False Argument for Redevelopment

Southbridge Care Homes Inc. has had a bad track record both during and before the pandemic according to inspection reports of its facilities. But the argument was made that the facilities simply needed to be redeveloped and modernized, hence the government’s decision to support Southbridge’s expansion and redevelopment efforts.

That has not been the case.

A brand new Southbridge facility opened in Owen Sound and within a short time of its opening, the Ministry of Long Term Care Inspection Branch shut down admissions because of concern that care there was so poor it was causing harm to residents. The report and letter justifying the cease admissions order by the Director is included with this letter. As well, a resident of this facility wrote a letter to the editor detailing the impact of conditions there on her life and well-being – also enclosed. All clearly outline the conditions under which residents of this facility have been forced to live.

The poor care-related history of this company, the subsequent harm to residents, the Ontario government’s use of its legislative power against municipalities, their citizens, and the families of those who have died, and now its failure to release information related to its issuing of licenses and redevelopment and bed extension contracts to Southbridge that it has enforced by MZO’s has led Seniors for Social Action Ontario to believe that there may be malfeasance involved in the negotiation and awarding of these contracts to this company.

We understand the role of your Office as being to “hold provincial public sector and broader public sector organizations accountable for financial responsibility, well-managed programs, and transparency in public reporting.”

In the case of licensing and expanded and redeveloped bed awards, especially to Southbridge facilities in Pickering, Port Hope, and Owen Sound, we believe there is significant evidence to demonstrate that this government has not demonstrated financial responsibility or transparency, and that the services it is funding are not meeting the needs of current residents nor will they meet the need of future residents based upon this company’s track record.

We are therefore asking that your Office conduct a review of the awarding of the contracts for Orchard Villa in Pickering, and Southbridge’s facilities in Port Hope and in Owen Sound to determine whether or not the contracting process with this company addresses value for money requirements and meets the standard of good financial management of tax dollars and transparency in public reporting.

Thank you for considering our request.

Dr. Patricia Spindel, Chair, Seniors for Social Action (Ontario) on behalf of the co-founders, leaders, and members of SSAO