

Check Against Delivery

We Believe: A Benefit for SACE (Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton) February 10, 2016, Edmonton Honourable Irfan Sabir, Minister, Human Services

Good evening, everyone.

I am honoured to be here and bring greetings on behalf of Premier Rachel Notley and my Government of Alberta colleagues...many of whom are here tonight.

The Honourable Sarah Hoffman sends her regrets at not being able to join you.

I want to start by acknowledging the important work of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton.

In four decades, you have provided tremendous support to many people who likely didn't know where else to turn.

During those 40 years, you have listened and you have believed...and that has made a huge difference in so many lives.

I am pleased to see the number of people who have come out to show their support tonight...and to show that we, also, believe.

I understand that tonight's attendance is nearly twice as large as last year's.

That's a testament to the growing awareness of sexual assault.

And more importantly, to the growing support in the community for sexual assault survivors.

There is power in numbers.

And the large number of supporters who have turned out tonight sends a powerful message:

There is no place in our society for silence and secrecy when it comes to sexual violence.

Our government recognizes that sexual violence is a serious social issue.

One that has devastating consequences for our communities and victims.

The physical, emotional and mental impacts of this horrendous crime on women, men and children cannot be overstated.

The trauma resulting from this crime can lead to myriad life-altering problems.

Addiction, mental illness, medical problems, self-harm, suicide, parenting challenges, poverty, homelessness and domestic violence are just some of them.

That's a long list.

It's estimated that one in three Canadian women and at least one in six Canadian men experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

And only about 5 per cent of those victims go to the police.

This culture of silence is why two simple words: "We Believe" are so important.

It's our job, as members of society, to believe survivors of sexual violence.

It's our job to break down the wall of silence and shame...and create an environment of community, hope and healing.

It's our job to help survivors speak up.

By pledging to believe and support those who report assaults, we are changing societal attitudes for the better.

We all have a role to play.

Last year, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services ran a "Hash-tag-I-believe-you" campaign.

This awareness campaign demonstrated that three small words can make a real difference.

After that campaign, a survey showed that the number of people who said they would respond positively to a survivor of sexual assault more than doubled.

I ask that you remember those three words when you are in the presence of a survivor:

"I believe you."

And, also, another four important words:

"It's not your fault."

Your support will make it much more likely for a survivor to get help, seek justice and make our communities healthier for everyone.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Alberta, I want to thank all of you for being here this evening and supporting such an important cause.

Enjoy the rest of the night.

Thank you.