

For Immediate Release  
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## **ONTARIO JOINS NATIONAL PARTNERS TO PROTECT CONSUMERS** *Fraud Awareness Month Puts Focus On Dishonest Business Practices*

QUEEN'S PARK — Consumers should shop carefully and be alert to sales pitches that sound too good to be true, Government Services Minister Gerry Phillips said today as he kicked off Fraud Awareness Month in Ontario.

“Consumers should always be on guard when buying goods or services - the best way to do that is for consumers to ensure they are dealing with legitimate suppliers,” said Phillips.

“Although we are focusing on fraud awareness this month, obviously consumers should shop carefully and be alert all year round,” Phillips said. “The vast majority of business owners in this province are honest – it is the dishonest individuals, who prey on innocent consumers and vulnerable groups like seniors, who we want to put out of business.”

The Fraud Awareness Campaign objective is to educate consumers about fraud, encourage the reporting of fraud and help make Canada a hostile environment for the perpetrators of fraud.

Ontario is joining more than 70 partners in the country-wide campaign including other governments, law enforcement agencies, consumer groups and private sector companies.

The McGuinty government has taken a number of steps recently to better protect consumers, especially seniors, and expose fraudulent activities including

- Passed a tough new Consumer Protection Act featuring the most sweeping and comprehensive changes to Ontario's consumer laws in more than 30 years
- Strengthened enforcement resources at the ministry's Consumer Services Branch including the hiring of three additional investigators
- Launched a discussion paper with stakeholders to identify legislative reforms that will combat identity theft and educate consumers to the growing problem
- Created the Consumer Beware List, an online database listing businesses with unresolved complaints and convictions
- Distributed more than 220,000 Fraud Free calendars featuring tips and advice for consumers to avoid frauds and scams
- Published seven consumer brochures on a variety of consumer topics available in eight languages
- Created an online fraud quiz available on the ministry's website to help consumers avoid being defrauded.

Under Ontario's new Consumer Protection Act, fines for individuals and corporations have been increased. Maximum jail terms have been increased. The act also strengthens consumer protection by ensuring businesses keep consumers informed during transactions and improving a consumer's right to cancel a transaction.

"This legislation is a significant advance in consumer protection," said Joan Huzar, president of the Consumers' Council of Canada. "Ontario's new consumer laws are a model for other jurisdictions to follow."

Fraud Awareness Month is being led by the Fraud Prevention Forum, which is chaired by Industry Canada's Competition Bureau. The forum is made up of governments, law enforcement agencies, consumer groups and private sector companies.

The campaign features Phonebusters' "*Recognize it. Report it. Stop it.*" program. The Canada-wide initiative is designed to educate consumers to the existence of fraud and urge them to report dishonest business practices.

Phonebusters is a national anti-fraud call centre jointly operated by the Ontario Provincial Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and plays a key role in educating the public about fraudulent telemarketing pitches.

Consumers who want information or advice on how to protect themselves in the marketplace can call the ministry's Consumer Services Bureau at 416-326-8800 or 1-800-889-9768 or visit the ministry's website at [www.mgs.gov.on.ca](http://www.mgs.gov.on.ca).

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