

For Immediate Release
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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT TO STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION *Amendments To Detail Proposed New System*

TORONTO — The McGuinty government will propose amendments to further strengthen and clarify Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

“We want to ensure that Ontario maintains its leading role as a promoter of human rights, opponent of discrimination and protector of the vulnerable,” said Bryant. “Our proposed amendments to Bill 107 respond to what we have heard during ongoing consultations, in legislative committee hearings, and in meetings with Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The proposed law would make our new human rights system stronger, faster and more effective.”

Proposed key government amendments to Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, include:

- Entrenching a range of legal support services for those seeking a remedy at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, including the creation of a new publicly funded Human Rights Legal Support Centre
- Strengthening the Commission’s power to investigate human rights issues, and its right to intervene in all matters before the Tribunal
- Enhancing the Commission’s independence to act at its own discretion, and in the public interest. This would include reporting directly to the people of Ontario
- Clarifying the powers of the Tribunal to ensure procedural fairness and promote transparent decision-making
- Creating merit-based criteria for appointments to the Commission and Tribunal
- Eliminating the ability of the Tribunal to establish and charge fees
- Extending the limitation period for filing a claim from six months to one year
- Adjusting transitional provisions to allow existing complaints to be dealt with under the current system.

“I am confident that these amendments we are discussing would provide for a strengthened system for the protection and promotion of human rights in Ontario,” said Hall. “The bill presents an historic opportunity for the Commission to take a more proactive and strategic approach to the big systemic issues. I remain committed to working closely with the Attorney General, the tribunal Chair and other stakeholders on amendments to the bill, and to ensure a smooth transition to the new system.”

“These proposed amendments would ensure that Tribunal processes are fair and timely,” said Michael Gottheil, Chair of the Tribunal. “I intend, if the bill passes, to consult publicly on the Tribunal’s rules and procedures as we move forward.”

“We applaud the government for not adding more reports to the human rights reform file, and for taking concrete action,” said Michelle Schryer, Executive Director, Chatham-Kent Sexual Assault Crisis Centre. “These proposed amendments will help ensure that women have timely access to a hearing, and to having their rights enforced.”

“These proposed amendments would bring the province significantly closer to ensuring an efficient, effective and accessible human rights system in Ontario,” said Reva Devins, former human rights commissioner. “The government should be commended for taking these important steps.”

“Reform of our human rights system has been slow to come, but the time for more studies is over,” said Raj Anand, former chief commissioner. “With the proposed amendments, the Attorney General is delivering on years of studies, reports and recommendations. I applaud the McGuinty government’s courage in committing itself to meaningful and effective human rights enforcement.”

The McGuinty government is on the side of Ontario’s most vulnerable. That’s why it is proposing to modernize and strengthen Ontario’s human rights system to better prevent discrimination, and resolve complaints more fairly and efficiently. Other initiatives include:

- Passing the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005
- Setting up a Hate Crimes Community Working Group to make recommendations for improving services for victims of hate crimes and to prevent further victimization
- Introducing legislation that would, if passed, establish a police review system and create an independent civilian body to administer a new police complaints system.

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Contacts:

Greg Crone
Ministry of the Attorney General
Minister’s Office
(416) 326-1785

Brendan Crawley
Communications Branch
(416) 326-2210

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