

December 11, 2006

## ONTARIO'S GUNS AND GANGS STRATEGY GIVES POLICE AND PROSECUTORS THE TOOLS THEY NEED

The McGuinty government is on the side of Ontarians who are concerned about crime and safety. That is why it is doing everything in its power to get guns off our streets and make our communities safer. Fighting gun violence requires being tough on crime, using strong enforcement and effective prevention, and taking aim at the causes of crime. Ontario is creating healthy neighbourhoods by targeting investments in better housing, safe schools, after-school activities, and programs for under-served youths and adults. As part of its guns and gangs strategy, the Ontario government will continue to work with all levels of government and members of the community to find legislative changes and community-based initiatives to help end gun violence.

### BEING TOUGH ON CRIME

- **Provincial Operations Centre** — The government is establishing a state-of-the-art operations centre that will better allow for highly coordinated investigations and prosecutions of guns and gang-related offences. It was announced by the Premier in January 2006 as part of a \$51 million package of guns and gangs-related initiatives. The centre participants will include the newly expanded Guns and Gangs Task Force, Ontario Provincial Police, and probation and parole staff. Federal participation in the operations centre is being discussed. Construction is underway. It is expected that the centre will be fully operational by January 2007.
- **Expanded Guns and Gangs Task Force** — The task force includes police officers, Crown prosecutors and staff from the Victim/Witness Assistance Program who work together from the first day of an investigation. The Crown prosecutors provide early legal advice to police, especially on search warrants or other issues arising in an investigation. They also, where appropriate, get legal authorization for the police to conduct wiretaps. After charges are laid by police, Crown prosecutors prepare and conduct the prosecutions. The McGuinty government has expanded the task force twice since October 2005 for a total of 64 Crown prosecutors and their support staff, and 12 victim/witness service staff. To date, most (60) of the Crown prosecutors have been assigned. The remaining Crown prosecutors will be in position by the end of the year. In addition, Ontario and federal officials will continue discussions with a view to create teams of dedicated provincial and federal prosecutors working together to take action on gun and related drug crimes.
- **Expanded Provincial Weapons Enforcement Unit (PWEU)** — In January 2006, the McGuinty government announced that an additional 15 OPP officers would be assigned to the PWEU. They have been recruited, for a total of 58 officers in the unit.

- **Funding for Policing in High-Priority Areas** — The government has provided the Toronto Police Service with \$5 million in funding to strengthen its offensive against gangs in high-priority areas of the city. This effort included the establishment of three rapid response teams each consisting of 18 highly trained police officers, specializing in drugs and guns interdiction to work on the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy. To date, police have seen tremendous results including more than 5,420 arrests, the seizure of more than 320 guns from the streets and establishing more than 36,030 business and community contacts. This funding also included \$2 million for the installation of security cameras at targeted locations, as well as the expansion of the capacity of the police to obtain wiretap and search warrants.
- **Major Crime Courts** — The province is establishing Major Crime Courts designed to increase the criminal justice system’s capacity to respond to large-scale, gun and gang-related prosecutions. The first major crime courtroom, located at 361 University Avenue in Toronto, is now operational. The second, located at 2201 Finch Avenue West in Toronto, is expected to be ready by fall 2007. The courts will be equipped with higher levels of security and be capable of dealing with multiple defendants. Three new judges have been appointed to deal with the anticipated increase in the volume of work.
- **1,000 Additional Police Officers** — Under the Safer Communities – 1,000 Officers Partnership program, about 970 officers, including 250 in Toronto, are or soon will be on duty. At the request of municipal partners, the remaining 30 officers will be hired and trained in early 2007.
- **Additional Probation and Parole Officers** — The government is hiring 12 new probation and parole officers to conduct risk assessments on individuals accused of offences related to guns and gangs. Three support staff have also been hired.
- **The Centre of Forensic Sciences** — The government has increased funding to the centre to expand its capacity to perform ballistic testing and forensic analysis.
- **Bail Blitz Teams** — The province has established bail blitz teams, which consist of police, Crown prosecutors and duty counsel working together to expedite the bail court process at certain sites for criminal cases, including those involving guns. Teams are working at College Park Courthouse and Old City Hall Courthouse in Toronto and at the Ottawa Courthouse.
- **Calling on Federal Government** — The Ontario government called on the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to:
  - implement mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes
  - impose a reverse onus for bail for all gun crimes.

The federal government has recognized the need to change sentences. Proposed federal legislation would also create two new Criminal Code gun theft offenses — “robbery with intent to steal a gun” and “breaking and entering with intent to steal a gun,” and impose a reverse onus for bail for all gun crimes.

We continue to call on the federal government to move as quickly as possible to amend the Criminal Code to:

- implement a **handgun ban**
  - set more **severe penalties for breach of bail** conditions
  - maintain the **federal gun registry**.
- **No Deals for Gun Offenders** — Ontario Crown prosecutors are instructed not to withdraw or plea-bargain firearms-related offences unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Crown must also seek appropriate sentences that will act as a deterrent and, in appropriate cases, consider seeking sentences higher than the mandatory minimum.

- **Gun Amnesty** — The Project PEACE gun amnesty was implemented by the Toronto Police Service and supported by the Ministry of the Attorney General from November 7-30, 2005. A total of 261 guns, including 33 handguns, and 1,554 rounds of ammunition were collected.
- **“Blitz” Inspections of Gun-Licensed Businesses in Toronto** — The government funded a blitz inspection of 32 gun-licensed businesses in Toronto in September 2005, to ensure gun storage and safekeeping standards were being met. The Chief Firearms Office is now incorporating unannounced inspections of gun-licensed businesses across the province into its regular procedures. Previously, most inspections were scheduled in advance.
- **Ontario’s Witness Protection Program** — The program has been improved to encourage more community members to come forward when they have witnessed a serious crime. The Ministry of the Attorney General has improved short-term protection, and reduced the red tape involved in obtaining admission to the program and receiving a new identity. The Attorney General will continue to work with his federal counterpart to improve the federal witness protection plan so that it can work in a coordinated manner with Ontario’s program.
- **Community Impact Evidence** — The Ministry of the Attorney General is implementing new and innovative ways for Crown prosecutors to seek tougher sentences by developing and presenting evidence to the court about the devastating impact of gun violence on individuals and communities.

## **BEING TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF CRIME**

- **Youth Opportunity Strategy** — The government is investing \$28.5 million over the first three years of the strategy to improve outcomes for youth in under-served communities, beginning primarily with neighbourhoods in Toronto. Next year, the strategy will be expanded to additional under-served communities in municipalities across the province, including Windsor, Ottawa, London, Hamilton and Thunder Bay.

The strategy includes the following five components:

- **Summer Jobs For Youth Program** — In 2006, this program provided summer jobs for 800 youth from under-served communities in Toronto. The program includes pre-employment readiness, employment placements and post-employment supports in a variety of fields including business, recreation and youth leadership. In summer 2007, the program will be expanded to 1,650 youth from under-served communities across the province.
- **Youth Outreach Worker Program** — This program employs 39 youth outreach workers (35 in Toronto and four in Durham Region) who are building relationships with hard to reach youth, providing advice and connecting them to appropriate services in their communities. In 2007, an additional 23 outreach workers will be hired to work in under-served communities across the province, bringing the total to 62 outreach workers in Ontario.
- **Youth in Policing Initiative** — In summer 2006, 100 youth from under-served communities in Toronto worked with the Toronto Police Service in a range of areas to develop skills relevant to a possible future career in policing. Five additional youth worked with the Durham Regional Police in a similar program. In summer 2007, the initiative will be expanded, enabling at least 60 more youth to work with other police service organizations across the province.

- **YouthConnect.ca** — The government’s new website, YouthConnect.ca, provides a forum for young people to access information, services and resources that will help them make good choices, achieve success and contribute positively to their communities.
- **School-based Prevention/Diversion Program** — This program is a partnership among schools, school boards, community-based agencies and police that helps high school students under 18 years of age, who are at risk of becoming involved or are already involved in violent and/or offending activity, increase their chances of school success. Trained peer mediators and school and community staff work together with students to address issues leading to offending behaviour, develop new skills, increase school attachment and take on leadership roles. The program is being delivered in 12 communities across the province in 2006-07. In 2007-08, the program will be offered in six additional communities bringing the total to 18 communities.
- **Down with Guns Program** — The government has directed \$3 million to a community-designed initiative that is being led by the African-Canadian Christian Network in partnership with the Toronto Community Foundation. This youth anti-violence strategy is focused on four key areas: family, education, employment and crime prevention.
- **Youth Challenge Fund** — This community-driven initiative is sponsoring local programs, training and jobs for youth faced with significant challenges. Chaired by Toronto Argonauts Head Coach Mike “Pinball” Clemons, the Challenge Fund Board will target youth from 13 under-served Toronto neighbourhoods. Community members and organizations are able to apply to the fund to cover the costs of new or existing local programs that help provide youth with the opportunities they need to reach their full potential. The Premier challenged the private sector and private contributors to match the government’s initial \$15 million investment. The government will then match private sector contributions up to an additional \$15 million, for a potential total investment of more than \$45 million over the next three years.
- **Youth Justice Committees** — The Youth Justice Committee program, an alternative to the formal court process that holds low-risk young offenders accountable and addresses issues that may lead to re-offending, is being expanded to a total of 46 communities across the province.
- **Youth Intervention Centres** — Since April 2006, the government has established an additional 14 youth intervention centres for a total of 29 across the province. The centres provide structured and closely supervised programs where youth in conflict with the law accept responsibility for their actions, and develop anger management, learning, employment and other life skills to help reintegrate them into their communities.
- **African Canadian Youth Justice Program** – In May 2006, the Ontario government, in partnership with the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC), launched an innovative new program to help youth, aged 12 to 17, achieve better outcomes through appropriate community-based, culturally-sensitive services and referrals. Operating out of four Toronto-area youth court locations, the program offers both court workers and reintegration social workers to assist youth in accessing community supports and resources, including counselling and mentorship opportunities.
- **Community Use of Schools** — The province has invested \$20 million annually for the past three years in the Community Use of Schools program. The program encourages increased use of schools by not-for-profit groups at reduced rates during non-school hours to promote participation in a range of community activities such as recreation and physical activity programs.

- **Safe Schools Action Team** — The McGuinty government has appointed a special Safe Schools Action Team to advise on the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address physical and social safety issues in all Ontario schools. The government's Safe Schools Strategy includes provincewide school safety audits, bullying-prevention training for principals, tools such as school climate surveys and a review of the Safe Schools Act. Funding has been provided to school boards for new security devices and bullying prevention programs (\$1,500 per elementary school and \$2,000 per secondary school, totalling \$7.83 million).
- **Kids Help Phone** – The government entered into a three-year, \$3-million partnership with Kids Help Phone. This will double the helpline's capacity to provide anonymous counselling to students in Ontario who are dealing with bullying issues. For the first half of 2006 alone, Kid's Help Phone counsellors received and responded to 21,583 contacts from Ontario youths - an increase of 16 per cent compared to the same period in 2005. For bullying related calls, the increase was a remarkable 224 per cent. Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24-hour, seven-day-a-week toll-free, anonymous referral and information service. Services are available to children and youth in English and French by calling the toll free phone number or through online web counselling. Information materials, including posters and wallet cards to inform students about the Kids Help Phone, have been provided to school boards.
- **Leave Out ViolencE (LOVE)** — A special project grant was provided to LOVE to provide outreach and support to school children and youth in high-risk neighbourhoods. Youth leaders are being trained to become peer mentors and will conduct presentations in schools to help empower youth and children to take a stand against the violence that has penetrated their communities and prevent re-victimization.
- **Learning to 18** — To improve students' achievement in high school increase graduation rates and dramatically reduce the unacceptably high dropout rate, the government launched the \$1.3 billion Student Success Strategy. It includes: the introduction of legislation that would, if passed, ensure that students keep learning to age 18 or graduation; new Specialist High-Skills Majors within the high school diploma; opportunities for students to earn dual credits through college, apprenticeship and postsecondary courses that count toward the high school diploma; and expanded cooperative education choices. As a part of the strategy, students are benefiting from additional teachers dedicated to student success in every secondary school, innovative lighthouse programs, class-size limits in key courses and upgraded technological education equipment.
- **Apprenticeship Training** — \$1.466 million over three years for projects under the Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program: approximately 140 at-risk youth will have learned practical skills to help them become eligible for apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades.

- 30 -

Contact:  
 Brendan Crawley  
 Ministry of the Attorney General  
 Communications Branch  
 (416) 326-2210

*Disponible en français*

[www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca)