

For Immediate Release
October 19, 2006

**MCGUINITY GOVERNMENT IMPROVES ACCESS
TO THE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

New Act Establishes Greater Openness, Transparency And Accountability

TORONTO — A comprehensive bill passed by the Ontario legislature will modernize the justice system and improve access to justice, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

“The McGuinty government is working hard to ensure Ontarians get enhanced access to justice,” said Bryant. “The Access to Justice Act will make the justice system more effective and accessible, benefiting all Ontarians.”

The Access to Justice Act, 2006 will regulate paralegals and reform the justice of the peace system. It will also update the Provincial Offences Act, the Limitations Act, 2002 and the Courts of Justice Act. A new act, the Legislation Act, will be created to update the rules for the use, publication and interpretation of Ontario’s laws.

The Access to Justice Act will provide for paralegal regulation in order to give consumers a choice in qualified legal services while protecting people who get legal advice from non-lawyers. For the first time in Canada’s history, paralegals will be required to receive training, carry liability insurance and report to a public body that can investigate complaints.

“Today, paralegals joined the ranks of doctors, lawyers and teachers as a regulated profession in Ontario,” said Bryant. “We are really witnessing the birth of a new profession.”

Under the act, the Law Society of Upper Canada, which has the experience and ability to regulate professionals providing legal services, will regulate paralegals. A paralegal standing committee, with a non-lawyer majority, chaired by a paralegal, will take the lead in implementing paralegal regulation for the Law Society.

“The Law Society will play an important role in regulating paralegals,” said Gavin MacKenzie, Treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada. “We will ensure that consumers who use legal services, whether through lawyers or paralegals, are properly protected. We welcome this legislation as a means to safeguard consumers.”

“By regulating paralegals, the government has strengthened the role of paralegals in Ontario. This legislation will recognize and enhance the value that licensed paralegals provide to the public,” said paralegal Margaret Louter. “Paralegals will have a prominent role in the governance of the Law Society and in particular over the regulation of paralegals.”

The Access to Justice Act will ensure a more open and transparent appointment process for justices of the peace. Reforms will establish minimum qualifications for justices of the peace and establish a new Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee that will reflect Ontario's diversity and regional differences. The act introduces increased flexibility by providing that experienced retired justices of the peace can be temporarily assigned to specific matters on a per diem basis.

"These reforms will improve the administration of justice and in particular proceedings under the Provincial Offences Act," said Doug Reycraft, president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. "The passage of this legislation addresses a long-standing concern of municipal governments in Ontario."

An amendment to the Provincial Offences Act will permit witnesses in proceedings under the act to be heard and cross-examined by electronic means.

"Changes to the Provincial Offences Act will allow police officers to give evidence outside of court, through technology such as video conferencing which will free up officers for other important services," said Bob Baltin, president of the Police Association of Ontario.

The Access to Justice Act will also:

- Amend the Limitations Act, 2002 to promote a healthy business environment, by allowing businesses the flexibility to set their own limitation periods that are either longer or shorter than those set by the current statute. The act will allow potential litigants to extend limitation periods to promote the settlement of disputes out of court.
- Amend the Courts of Justice Act to provide greater transparency and accountability for the administration of the courts. The publication of an annual report on the operations of the courts will be required.
- Create the Legislation Act, which brings the way laws are made and interpreted into the electronic age. For example, the act will make the electronic version of our laws the official version of a statute.

The Access to Justice Act is just one of the ways the McGuinty government is providing Ontarians with improved access to justice.

- 30 -

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