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ONTARIO PASSES HUMAN RIGHTS CODE AMENDMENT ACT
Historic New Law To Strengthen Human Rights System

TORONTO — The Ontario legislature has passed Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

“This is great news for the people of Ontario. This new law will better prevent discrimination, and resolve complaints more quickly and efficiently,” said Bryant. “It will modernize and strengthen Ontario’s human rights system, and bring us in line with the United Nations’ standards for human rights enforcement.”

The Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, will bring the most significant changes to the human rights system in Ontario since it was created 44 years ago.

A new complaints process will be implemented, with individual claims being filed directly with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

Under the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, the mandate of the Ontario Human Rights Commission will be better balanced between its roles of investigating human rights issues, and addressing discrimination in Ontario through proactive measures such as public education, promotion, public advocacy, research and monitoring.

The Commission will have the power to inquire into any matter if it believes doing so is in the public interest, and the right to intervene in any application before the Tribunal. The legislation will also permit the Commission to bring its own application before the Tribunal.

The act will establish a new Legal Support Centre, publicly funded and publicly accountable, to administer a cost-effective and efficient provincewide system for providing legal and other support services related to all aspects of applications to the Tribunal. This will mean service and support for applicants from the beginning to the end of the process, including the enforcement of Tribunal orders.

“These changes will produce one of the most advanced and progressive human rights systems in the world,” said John Fraser, executive director of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. “Direct access to a human rights hearing is critical if human rights in Ontario are to be protected and promoted.”

“The Ontario government is to be commended for reforming our human rights complaints process. Those victimized by discrimination will now have a fair and timely hearing process,” said Raj Anand, former chief commissioner. “This legislation is likely to be one of the enduring legacies of this government, strengthening the protection of equality rights in Ontario.”

“The meaningful reform of our human rights system, as set out in the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006 will ensure Ontario remains an international leader in human rights protection,” said James Morton, president of the Ontario Bar Association. “By implementing the principle of direct access to the Human Rights Tribunal in Ontario, the government has created a model system that will benefit generations to come.”

“There has been important debate on the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, which has improved and strengthened the legislation,” said Bryant. “Now is the time for all parties to work together to ensure that the legislation does what it is intended to do — ensure access to justice for those who face discrimination.”

- 30 -

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