

For Immediate Release  
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## **MCGUINITY GOVERNMENT IMPROVES ACCESS TO JUSTICE WITH PASSAGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS CODE AMENDMENT ACT**

The McGuinty government is modernizing and strengthening Ontario's human rights system to better prevent discrimination, and resolve complaints more quickly and efficiently. The Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006 (Bill 107) will bring the greatest changes to the human rights system in Ontario since it was created 44 years ago. It will improve the promotion, advancement and enforcement of human rights in Ontario.

The reforms, which are consistent with the recommendations of a number of reports, including the 1992 Cornish report, will improve services to the public and advance human rights in the province.

Under the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006, a new complaints process will be implemented, with individual claims being filed directly with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

All applications to the Tribunal that are timely and within the Tribunal's jurisdiction will be heard on their merits, in a faster and more open resolution process. Organizations will be allowed, for the first time, to bring an application on another's behalf, and the limitation period for filing a claim will be extended to one year. Adjudicators at the Tribunal will have expertise in human rights and be appointed in a transparent, competitive process.

The Ontario Human Rights 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 Commission will report annually to the people of Ontario and will have the authority to make any other reports it deems necessary. Commissioners will for the first time, be required to have expertise in human rights and reflect Ontario's diversity.

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.

### Other Access To Justice Initiatives

The government has implemented a number of other initiatives to modernize and improve access to Ontario's justice system while providing greater openness, transparency and accountability. These initiatives include:

- Passing Bill 14, the Access to Justice Act that:
  - Regulates paralegals
  - Amends the Justices of the Peace Act
  - Amends the Provincial Offences Act
  - Creates the Legislation Act, modernizing the rules for interpreting and publicizing Ontario's statutes and regulations
  - Amends the Limitations Act
  - Amends the Courts of Justice Act
- Appointing 61 judges, 45 justices of the peace and additional court staff to shorten the time it takes to get cases to trial. The government has also hired 64 Crowns who are dedicated to the Guns and Gangs Task Force. As well, the complement of judges that hears family and child protection cases in the Ontario Court of Justice has increased by six.
- Re-establishing an independent and modern Law Commission of Ontario, which will develop recommendations on how to improve the administration of justice and enhance access to justice.
- Introducing Bill 103, the Independent Police Review Act, 2006 that would, if passed, create an independent civilian body to administer the police review system in Ontario.
- Increasing funding to Legal Aid Ontario by \$13 million in 2006/07. Since October 2003, the McGuinty government has increased base funding by 10 per cent, or \$25 million.
- Adopting policies and procedures to enhance the openness of the justice system to the media and public, promote greater access to information and support education for justice partners and the media.
- Establishing a pro bono task force to look at new ways for government lawyers to do pro bono work in the community. This includes the Adopt-a-School Project, in which lawyers support high school teachers in law and civics classes.
- Enacting Bill 27, the Family Statute Law Amendment Act, which ensures that all family law arbitrations are governed by Ontario and Canadian law.

- 30 -

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