

For Immediate Release  
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## **MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT ACHIEVING RESULTS IN IMPROVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

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

- Introducing Bill 14, the Access to Justice Act, 2005 that would, if passed:
  - Regulate paralegals and give consumers more choice in qualified legal services while protecting people who get legal advice from non-lawyers
  - Amend the Justices of the Peace Act to reform the appointment process, establish minimum qualifications and improve the complaints and discipline process
  - Amend the Provincial Offences Act to allow witnesses to be heard by video conferencing or other electronic means
  - Create the Legislation Act, which would make Ontario's statutes and regulations more accessible to the public
  - Amend the Limitations Act to give potential litigants and businesses the opportunity to reach their own arrangements on limitation periods, which is a time period that sets out how long a person has to start legal proceedings
  - Amend the Courts of Justice Act to increase the use of periodic payments to provide compensation for successful plaintiffs of medical malpractice cases and reduce subsidies to medical doctors' malpractice insurance.
- Appointing former associate chief justice of Ontario Coulter Osborne to lead the Civil Justice Reform Project, which will develop options to reform the civil justice system to make it more accessible and affordable.
- Introducing Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006 that would, if passed, improve and strengthen the promotion, advancement and enforcement of human rights in Ontario.
- 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.

- Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of Toronto civil courts by moving some operations to a new location at 330 University Ave. and expanding the capacity of the civil court system.
- Announcing the construction of two major crime courts in Toronto designed to meet the requirements of large, complex trials that involve multiple accused.
- Increasing funding to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) by \$13 million in 2006/07. Since October 2003, the McGuinty government has increased base funding for LAO by 10 per cent, or \$25 million. The government is the agency's biggest funder.
- Establishing a panel on justice and the media to promote mutual understanding and strengthen public trust in the justice system. The ministry is now considering 17 recommendations made by the panel in the areas of openness, education, working in the electronic age and the ongoing relationship between justice and the media.
- Implementing a new regulatory scheme to protect people who hire lawyers on a contingency fee basis. Contingency fee agreements lower the cost barrier for people seeking access to justice.
- 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 teachers in legal education.
- Appointing 57 judges, 40 Justices of the Peace and additional court staff to shorten the time it takes to get cases to trial. The government also hired 64 new Crowns who are dedicated to the Guns and Gangs Task Force and related matters. As well, the complement of judges that hear family and child protection cases in the Ontario Court of Justice has increased by six.
- Enacting Bill 27, the Family Statute Law Amendment Act, which ensures that all family law arbitrations are governed by Ontario and Canadian law.
- Establishing a Family Law Working Group to look at ways to modernize family law in Ontario.
- Working to improve family law restraining orders as part of the Domestic Violence Action Plan.
- Providing low-income Ontarians with greater access to justice through court fee waivers. People who meet the eligibility criteria automatically qualify for fee waivers, while those who do not qualify may ask a judge, in writing, for a waiver.

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