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ONTARIO OPENS FIRST MAJOR CRIME COURT

Courtroom Designed To Accommodate Complex Gang-Related Trials

TORONTO — Ontario is now better equipped to handle large trials with its first major crime court, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

“This major crime court is an integral piece of Ontario’s Guns and Gangs Strategy,” said Bryant. “We have a number of large-scale, gang-related cases making their way through the system. We have already expanded our prosecution team to include dozens and dozens more Crown prosecutors and now, with this new courtroom, we are further increasing the ability of the criminal justice system to accommodate the unique requirements of complex trials.”

The new courtroom facility at 361 University Avenue in Toronto will include extra security measures, a separate enclosed entrance for witnesses, a prisoner box that can hold multiple accused, larger jury boxes and specialized technical systems to allow for the presentation of large volumes of evidence. Many of the extra features are mobile so that they can be used, if needed, in trials across the province.

“We’ve designed this courtroom with maximum flexibility to ensure the courtroom is being used at all times,” said Bryant. “Starting today, it can house regular criminal trials but it can also accommodate major-scale, complex gang cases when needed.”

A second similar major crime court is currently under construction at the 2201 Finch Avenue Courthouse in Toronto. It is scheduled to open in fall 2007.

The McGuinty government is committed to fighting gun crime. That is why it is implementing a \$51-million package of initiatives, including:

- Expanding the number of Crown prosecutors working on the Guns and Gangs Task Force. The task force will have over 60 Crowns, including dedicated prosecutors working in every region of the province

- Establishing a state-of-the-art provincial operations centre to allow for highly coordinated investigations and prosecutions of gun and gang-related offences. Scheduled to open in January 2007, it will be located in the Greater Toronto Area. The centre will house the Guns and Gangs Task Force, which includes the Toronto Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police, a team of specialized Crown prosecutors, support staff, probation and parole officers and a victims unit
- Providing \$14 million to fast track the hiring of 1,000 additional police officers in 2006. Currently, 970 additional officers are or will soon be on the street. At the request of municipal partners, the remaining 30 officers will be hired and trained in early 2007.

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