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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT EXPANDS YOUTH JUSTICE COMMITTEES TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY SAFETY

Program To Increase Accountability, Reduce Re-Offending

TORONTO — The McGuinty government is doubling the number of Youth Justice Committees (YJCs) to help 23 more communities across the province deal more effectively with young people in trouble with the law, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

“Youth Justice Committees hold young people accountable for their actions, help get them off the path toward serious crime and encourage them to become contributing members of society,” said Bryant. “This successful initiative is part of our ongoing effort to prevent violence and reduce the threat of gang and gun violence in our communities.”

YJCs provide an alternative to prosecuting young people who have committed lower-risk offences, like mischief, theft and minor assaults. YJCs bring together youth ages 12 to 17, their parents, victims, and trained members of the community to work out an appropriate way for the young person to make amends for their actions. This could include community service, restitution to the victim, personally apologizing to the victim or attending a specific community-based intervention program.

The YJC program has proven successful in Ontario, with over 80 per cent of participants having no further contact with the justice system within one year of completion.

“Youth Justice Committee programs can have a powerful impact in reaching youth early and preventing serious crime,” said John Bilton, executive director of the John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington. “The John Howard Societies have been working with YJCs in Waterloo Region and Hamilton for a number of years, and will now begin work with the new Guelph YJC in Wellington County. These programs promote cooperation between the community, youth justice workers and social service agencies to help troubled youth get back on track.”

The McGuinty government is on the side of Ontario families concerned about crime and safety. The YJC program is one way the government is fulfilling its commitment to strengthening the youth justice system and providing community alternatives for youth in trouble with the law. Other initiatives include:

- Launching the Youth Challenge Fund with chair Michael “Pinball” Clemons, providing \$15 million for community-led programs targeted to young people in the GTA

- Providing \$3 million to support community-designed programs led by faith-based groups offering youth positive alternatives to violence
- Introducing a bullying prevention strategy and school safety audits
- Introducing legislation to keep student learning until at least age 18.

“Serious crime, especially involving violence, will continue to be prosecuted vigorously, but the McGuinty government is supporting community interventions for lower-risk offenders,” said Bryant. “The expansion of Youth Justice Committees are part of a comprehensive approach to providing timely and effective justice for young people in trouble with the law.”

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