

News Release Communiqué



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ONTARIO GOVERNMENT TO MODERNIZE HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM *Better Serving The Public The Aim Of Proposed Changes*

TORONTO — A stronger, faster, more effective human rights system that better serves the public is the aim of changes being proposed by the McGuinty government, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

“We want to serve the public better than ever before by modernizing Ontario’s human rights system,” said Bryant. “We want to improve the complaints process and better respond to complex human rights issues that have an impact on groups of people as well as individuals. Our aim is to improve and strengthen the promotion, advancement and enforcement of human rights.”

The current human rights system, which consists of the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, was created in 1962 to enforce the Ontario Human Rights Code, the first of its kind in Canada. The commission is an independent agency, accountable to the legislature through the Attorney General. It currently conducts some public education and research, and it receives, settles and investigates human rights complaints. The tribunal hears and decides cases referred to it by the commission.

Under a proposed new model in legislation to be introduced later this spring, the commission would focus on advancing human rights and preventing discrimination through proactive measures, such as public education, research and monitoring to address systemic discrimination. The government would also establish an anti-racism secretariat within the commission that would provide recommendations and advice to the chief commissioner about research and policy to fight racism.

The commission would maintain the power to file a complaint on its own behalf directly to, or intervene with, the tribunal. The tribunal, meanwhile, would provide a modern, streamlined, and efficient way of resolving disputes by allowing individuals or groups to file claims directly with the tribunal.

“Despite considerable success, the commission has long called for change to speed up the complaints process and to better promote a human rights culture that prevents discrimination at work, in housing and services,” said Barbara Hall, chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. “We will work with the government to build a renewed system that meets these goals and keeps Ontario’s position as an international leader in human rights.”

“Human rights are fundamental. It's important that all Ontarians have timely access to a fair and transparent system of enforcement and dispute resolution,” said Michael Gottheil, chair of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. “Many people have been seeking change for a long time, and as chair, I am happy to assist in implementing these changes, and to assist in designing rules and procedures that promote the important objectives of the code.”

“We are pleased to see the government make these important changes to the system,” said Kathy Laird, director of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. “They are long overdue. A human rights system that is able to promote greater tolerance and deal more effectively with human rights violations will ensure Ontarians are treated with dignity and respect.”

“Our aim is to ensure that Ontario remains an international leader in the advancement of human rights and to improve access to justice for those who face discrimination,” Bryant said.

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