REMARKS BY

Hon. Jean Augustine, PC, CM
Fairness Commissioner

At the
13th National Metropolis Conference

'Internationally-Educated Immigrants: Steps Towards their Successful Integration into the Canadian Labour Market' Workshop

Thursday March 24, 2011
2:00 p.m.

Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre
Gulf Islands A
Lower Lobby Level, North Tower

'Implementing the Recommendations of the Office of the Fairness Commissioner to Improve Professional Licensing in Ontario'

Not for distribution

Thank-you.

I would like to bring a slightly different perspective to this workshop. My eye is firmly trained on the province of Ontario. I will speak about recommendations I have made to improve the system for licensing professionals. And I'll also talk about the need for ongoing improvements.

A word of background….

My office works with 40 regulatory bodies. They include professions in health care such as nursing and medicine and in non-health fields such as accounting and engineering. Ontario has a law that requires these professions to have licensing that is transparent, objective, impartial and fair.

Anyone who wants to practise a profession deserves fair treatment, no matter where he or she was educated: in Ontario, here in B.C., or elsewhere in the world.

Faster, fairer access to the professions is good for individuals so that more highly-skilled professionals can work at their full potential. It's also good for the economy.

I'm working on long-term and institutional change. I need to be clear: my role is to create systemic change *in the regulatory sector*, not with employers.

Since our office opened four years ago, we have worked closely with the regulatory bodies. The regulators are engaged. Let me give you some examples….

Internationally-trained lawyers don't have to do *compulsory* articling anymore. The regulatory body for dentistry has streamlined its assessment of general dentists who were trained elsewhere. The regulatory body for medical radiation techs re-evaluated its language requirements to make sure they actually correspond to the language level you need to do the work. And so on….

We have seen progress.

But the bottom line is, there are still too many unemployed or underemployed professionals in Ontario. Licensing in the professions is costly, complex and time-consuming.

RECOMMENDATIONS…

Almost exactly one year ago, I put forward recommendations for inexpensive actions to help alleviate this situation.

I made proposals to the provincial and federal governments, as well as to applicants themselves. I won't go into those details here. Instead, I'll mention my five recommendations to regulators and to the agencies that actually assess people's qualifications and credentials.

- First, regulatory bodies should improve communication with applicants.
    - Now, every one of them is clearly identifying the steps to get a professional licence, and they're posting their fees online. Many have streamlined their processes to get rid of unnecessary steps. Many show the time the process normally takes.
- Second, I formally asked the regulators to look into the issue of work experience. Are their requirements truly necessary? Are they still relevant to be able to practise the profession?
    - Their reports came in on March 1. I'm pleased to tell you that our preliminary analysis is encouraging. Many identified changes they *intend to implement* without further nudging from me.
- Third, I proposed that immigrants be allowed to complete most steps for registration before they leave their home country.
    - Currently none of the regulatory bodies enable internationally trained applicants to do this. But some allow applicants to initiate some of the steps pre-arrival.
- Fourth, I urged them to strictly oversee their qualifications assessment agencies. These agencies run exams and tests, and they essentially decide who gets to practise a profession and who doesn't. Twenty eight of Ontario's 40 regulatory bodies outsource assessments.
    - About half tell us they are overseeing these agencies more closely.
- And fifth, I recommended that these agencies publish more details about the documents they require.
    - So far 12 agencies have informed my office of the actions they have taken.

My staff are following up to make sure these recommendations don't collect dust. As you can imagine this is a work in progress…

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT…

And that leads me directly to my second topic. To make sure that these were not one-shot recommendations my emphasis in the last year has been on continuous improvement.

I expect the regulatory bodies to keep moving forward with their plans for change, and I'll assess them to make sure there is follow-through. We will be working with each one to identify what it can do and when. I am not imposing a one-size-fits-all approach. We will be releasing details later this spring.

Let me wrap up.

The fair access law sets out what Ontario regulatory bodies have to do. They must have licensing that's transparent, objective, impartial and fair. I am encouraging them to implement the spirit and principles of fairness, not just narrow legal requirements. Why? Because everyone deserves a fair shot at getting registered in his or her profession, whether educated here, elsewhere in Canada, or outside the country.

The regulators are doing good work.

The recommendations we released last March are practical, realistic and would not require a lot of money. They — and a focus on continuous improvement — will make an enormous difference.

I feel I have gone quickly over a lot of ground. If you are interested in the work of my office, I encourage you to sign up for our e-newsletter. We send it out three times per year. One of my staff, Heather Robbins-Ballard, is here with a sign-up sheet. [POINT OUT HEATHER]

Thank-you.