



Ontario to Set Up Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

On November 18, the government announced that Ontario will become the second province to have an independent citizens' assembly on electoral reform.

The assembly will assess the current first-past-the-post voting system and alternative systems. If the assembly recommends a new voting system, that recommendation will be taken to voters in a referendum to be held before, or in conjunction with, the next provincial election.

The government also announced that a citizens' jury will be established to make recommendations regarding changes in how provincial political parties and election campaigns are financed.

Status of Bills

As of the final week of the Fall sitting:

In Committee:

Government Bill - Bill 118 (persons with disabilities) had second reading and

was referred to the Social Policy Committee. Hearings scheduled for January / February 2005.

First Reading only:

Government Bills - Bill 133 (environmental enforcement), and Bill 144 (labour relations).

First Reading only:

Private Members Bills - Bill 151 (card certification) and Bill 152 (successor rights) - Peter Kormos; Bill 126 (workplace harassment) - Marilyn Churley

Third Reading:

Government Bill - Bill 82 (teacher testing) debated December 14.

Passed:

Government Bill - Bill 63 (Employment Standards - hours of work) received Royal assent on December 9.

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The Political and Legislative Department
Ontario Federation of Labour
(416) 441-2731
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NDP Bills Would Extend Labour Law Reform

On November 25, NDP Labour Critic, Peter Kormos, introduced two Private Member's Bills which would amend the *Labour Relations Act*. Bill 151, Labour Relations Amendment Act (Certification), would amend the *Labour Relations Act* to allow the Ontario Labour Relations Board to certify a union without directing a representation vote, where the Board is satisfied that the union has signed up 55 percent of the employees.

Bill 152, Labour Relations Statute Law Amendment Act (Successor Rights) would amend the *Labour Relations Act* and the *Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act* with respect to successor rights. Currently, when an employer who is bound by a collective agreement sells the business, the new owner is still bound by the collective agreement. This bill would extend that to a situation where a contractor who provides services at a premise is replaced by another contractor. It would also extend the provision to crown employees and employees of agencies of the crown.

OFL Affiliates Lobby MPP's

The OFL and its affiliates spent the day at Queen's Park on December 9, lobbying MPP's from all three parties on Labour Law Reform. Following a briefing session to start the day, union members set out in teams of four to lobby the politicians to expand the scope of the proposed legislation on Labour Law Reform.

Kits with background information on the issues were provided to the teams, as well as questions to ask the politicians. The questions related to expanding card certification to all sectors, reinstating successor rights, opposing contracting out of public service jobs, reinstating collective bargaining rights for agricultural workers, and restoring anti-scab legislation.

Women's Health Services at Risk

Women's health programs are at risk for cutbacks and elimination because the Minister of Health has designated them as secondary, warns Toronto-Danforth MPP Marilyn Churley.

“The McGuinty government’s under-funding of our hospitals has put women at risk of losing access to clinical services integral to their health,” says the NDP Women’s Issues Critic.

Women’s health programs housed in hospitals are at risk for cutbacks, or delisting, under the budget process mandated by the Ministry of Health to deal with the province’s estimated \$600-million under-funding of Ontario hospitals. It gives hospitals directions that certain clinical services cannot be cut, while others can.

Among the “unprotected services” or ‘cutting block candidates’, are clinics and services primarily impacting women – abortion, breast care, gynaecology, obstetrics, services for women experiencing post-partum symptoms, and victims of sexual abuse.

“Post partum services have long been in low supply, and tragic events as the Johnson-Killinger case, and the Labbe Langer case have underscored their importance. The loss of another program to help mothers experiencing post partum symptoms is extremely troubling.”

The situation is even more acute in smaller, northern and remote areas, where the lack of services is already nearing a crisis level.

“The Minister is sending the message that balanced hospital budgets comes at the expense of the health and well being of Ontario women. If he believes that women have the right to equal access to health care, he will take these clinical services off the chopping block.”



Child Care Announcement Criticized

The Liberal government’s recently announced child care program did a double disservice to parents by first raising their expectations and then

dashing their hopes, says Hamilton East MPP Andrea Horwath.

Horwath criticized the government for breaking its promise to introduce regulated child care to 330,000 Ontario children. In December, Family and Children’s Services Minister Maria Bountrogianni unveiled a drastically watered-down child care pilot program in just three communities.

To avoid close scrutiny of the program, the government deliberately avoided bringing it to the legislature, Horwath suggested. She pointed out that, across the province, child care won’t be fully available for another 15 years.

“Your timetable’s so slow that a child born today will be old enough to babysit the next generation of children by the time your program kicks in,” Horwath said in Question Period.

Horwath noted that the provincial government has failed to partner with the federal government and invest provincial dollars to bring the popular, Quebec-style, not-for-profit system of regulated child care to Ontario.

KORMOS’ KORNER



NDP Labour Critic
Peter Kormos

“The Minister of Labour proposes legislation that will extend card certification only for workers in the construction industry. He says that’s because they are mobile and work in workplaces that are constantly changing.

But that’s not unique. That describes virtually every workplace in Ontario – workplaces filled with part-time contingent workers. Why does the Minister show such disdain and disregard for so many workers in the province, the most vulnerable workers, the ones whom most urgently need a union to represent them? He rightly protects workers in the construction trades, but offers no protection for the thousands of workers in low-paying jobs, mainly women, mainly new Canadians, who want a union representing them.

Card-based certification is hardly a radical proposal. It was the law in Ontario for decades under NDP, Liberal and Conservative governments. The Minister should show the courage people expect of him to restore the law as it existed under Bill Davis. In fact, he should pass my Bill (Bill 151) and give all workers in Ontario the same right to join a union.”

- Peter Kormos

