



Ontario Bar Association
Association du Barreau de l'Ontario
300-20 rue Toronto Street
Toronto, Ontario M5C 2B8
416-869-1047 • 1-800-668-8900
Fax/Télécopieur: 416-869-1390
www.oba.org

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Federal Government Abandons Families in Crisis *No relief for wait times in Family Court*

TORONTO –The Ontario Bar Association (OBA) said that the actions of the current federal government in abandoning plans to resolve the crisis facing Family Courts in Ontario is unacceptable. Bill C-17, which was introduced yesterday, gutted the commitment made in its predecessor Bill C-51 that would have significantly increased the number of Family Court judges across Canada and specifically in Ontario.

“The Federal Government is turning their back on Ontario families,” said OBA President Heather McGee. “The sad reality in Ontario is that 2 out of every 5 family relationship breakdowns will end up in a courtroom. Ontarians deserve better than wait-times that can run, in some jurisdictions, to a year before they see the inside of a courtroom. In addition, family issues that aren’t resolved in a timely manner can lead to increases in domestic violence, instability for vulnerable children and severe financial implications.”

On May 20, 2005, the previous government introduced Bill C-51: An Act to Amend the Judges Act, the Federal Courts Act and other Acts. Bill C-51 would have increased the number of family court judicial appointments with 12 of the new appointments slated to be in Ontario.

The report of the County Carleton Law Association in November 2005, “The Family Court in Crisis”, showed wait times of 13 months from settlement conference to court date.

“According to provincial median wait times, an Ottawa client without jumping the queue for healthcare could wait their turn and consecutively receive a knee replacement (123 days), a hip replacement (97 days), cataract surgery (78 days) and a CT scan (13 days) before they could appear before an Ottawa Family Court judge,” said McGee.

The OBA wrote to each Ontario federal MP asking them to speak out on behalf of their communities for increased judicial resources.

“This is very much a local issue,” said Ottawa lawyer Tom Conway of McCarthy Tétrault, LLP. “These are friends, neighbours & colleagues who are being affected. Someone needs to stand up for the families in crisis and we need our federal MPs to be those advocates. The local Law Association just sent a delegation in to brief Treasury Board President John Baird. We are certainly hoping that he will address the needs in his own community for increased family court resources and raise his voice on behalf of his constituents.”

The OBA, a branch of the Canadian Bar Association, represents 16,000 lawyers, judges, law professors and law students across the Province.

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For more information:

Jonathan Clancy
416-869-1047 / 1-800-668-8900 ext. 348
Cell: 416-454-8932

Catherine Revoy
416-869-1047/1-800-668-8900 ext. 357