

**Ontario Division**

175 Bloor Street East
Suite 700, North Tower
Toronto, Ontario M4W 3R8
Telephone: (416) 922-6065
Fax: (416) 922-7538
Toll Free: 1-800-268-7582
www.mssociety.ca

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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

- **Changes to Human Rights System May Jeopardize Access**
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Changes to Human Rights System May Jeopardize Access

The MS Society along with other organizations in Ontario is actively urging the Ontario government to reconsider announced changes to the human rights system. On February 20, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced the government would introduce legislation this spring with the goal of providing a quicker, more efficient method to resolve complaints. Under the proposals, individuals would be allowed to file human rights complaints directly with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario instead of initially applying to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Some background -- The Ontario Human Rights Code makes it illegal for anyone to discriminate against others on the basis of disability, sex, religion, race or certain other grounds. It bans discrimination in access to employment, enjoyment of goods, services, and facilities. It also requires employers, stores and others offering goods, services and facilities to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, racial and religious minorities and other groups. Currently, if you believe you have been discriminated against you can file a human rights complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission whose job it is to enforce the Code. The Commission then investigates the complaint, and if it agrees the complaint has merit and if it can not settle the complaint, takes the case to the independent Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. Legal representation is by a Commission lawyer. There are problems with the current system since it takes a long time for cases to move forward, and the Commission has been criticized for not moving more cases to the Tribunal.

The Ontario government's goal of faster access to resolve human rights complaints should be commended, however, the MS Society and others are concerned that by removing the

Commission from the process, it may actually prevent people with disabilities and others who cannot afford lawyers from filing well-founded complaints with the Tribunal.

The MS Society has sent letters to Premier Dalton McGuinty and Attorney General Michael Bryant pointing out problems with the proposed changes and urging a full public consultation. A copy of the letter to the Premier is attached.

What you can do – As a chapter/ unit of the MS Society or as an individual, you can do the following:

- Contact your local MPP by letter, e-mail or phone and let him/her know that you are concerned about the proposed changes that may result in people with disabilities having less access to the human rights system; urge your MPP to **push for a full public consultation** on the proposed changes before legislation is introduced. (You can find contact information for all MPPs at <http://www.ontla.on.ca> under Members at the top of the screen.)
- You can use portions of the letter below when you contact your MPP. If you have personal experience with using the human rights system, you could highlight how it has assisted you or conversely, if you have had problems with it, suggest how it could be improved.
- The MS Society key message is that legislation should not be introduced unless there is **full consultation with all stakeholders**, including people with disabilities.

For more background information about this issue, please see the AODA Alliance website at www.aodaalliance.org

Tax Tips Available Online at www.mssociety.ca

Recent changes to medical and disability expenses and credits may help reduce taxes for some people with MS. An article detailing these changes and other tax tips is on the MS Society of Canada website at www.mssociety.ca. You can access it from the home page or by clicking on Multiple Sclerosis/ Tips for Living with MS/ Government Programs That Can Help.

Latest ARCH Publication

The March 10, 2006 issue of ARCH Alert, produced by the ARCH Disability Law Centre, is available online. It also includes some tax tips for the 2005 tax year. Just click on <http://www.archdisabilitylaw.ca> and then go to Publications.

Government Relations and Social Action E-Alerts Online

The Government Relations and Social Action Alert newsletter is available online. Just go to www.mssociety.ca/ontario and click on Social Action/ Social Action Alert.

Deanna Groetzinger
Vice-President, Communications

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