



Response to Bill 140 – An Act to enact the Housing Services Act, 2010 repeal the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 and make complementary and other amendments to other Acts.

Context: Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Chair: Lorenzo Berardinetti, MPP
March 24, 2011
Committee Room #1 – Queen's Park

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Mr. Chair, Honourable Members, thank you for the opportunity to present today. My name is Jerry Lucas, and I am Vice President of Programs, for March of Dimes Canada. With me today is our Manager of Government Relations, Steven Christianson.

I will begin by introducing our organization and work in affordable housing, and then more specifically comment of Bill 140 within the context of Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

March of Dimes was formed 60 years ago to fund research to eradicate the threat of polio in Canada. Once accomplished, we shifted our focus to first helping polio survivors overcome the impact of their disability, and have since expanded our mandate to assisting all people with physical disabilities. March of Dimes has worked to identify, eliminate and prevent barriers to the full participation of Canadians with disabilities in all aspects of our society and economy.

Today, we are one of Canada's largest service providers to Canadians with disabilities, their families, caregivers, employers and communities – helping improve the lives and livelihoods of over 50,000 consumers in Ontario and across Canada. We provide a wide range of services, all which help consumers to live independently, including housing, attendant care, employment

supports, assistive devices funding, home and vehicle modifications, barrier free design, and recreation.

In 1981, March of Dimes began developing and delivering attendant services, which assists people with physical disabilities to live in their own homes in supportive housing and through outreach programs. Since that time we have become one of the largest attendant service providers in Ontario, assisting over 2000 consumers annually through 12 LHINs, and living in over 150 communities across the Province.

In the 1980s, March of Dimes also began developing non-profit housing and established a new charitable organization to develop and manage the facilities. The Ontario March of Dimes Non-Profit Housing Corporation owns and operates properties in Toronto, Hamilton, Oakville, Sarnia and will soon open a new congregate care home in Sudbury. All of our facilities have tenants who require affordable and accessible housing as well as assistance with the activities of daily living. Our tenants represent a wide range of ages, disabilities and support care needs, including people with acquired brain injuries and young adults with multiple disabilities who are medically fragile.

What is unique to our type of affordable housing is the need for a coordinated solution that provides affordable and accessible housing with support services.

Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy

Bill 140 appears to represent an administrative step towards achieving simplification in the system, improved coordination, and greater transparency in reporting of annual results. These goals can be positive, and we feel improvement can be made with the greater clarity proposed in the technical recommendations made by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, among others.

We are encouraged that the Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy acknowledges the complex and varied nature of affordable housing requirements, and the challenges within the current system to coordinate the development of appropriate solutions. However, it is unclear how Bill 140 will address these complex needs and lead to the development of new housing stock accessible to our constituents.

There is a shortage of housing for the average family or individual requiring affordable housing. The people we serve have a much more difficult time finding an appropriate housing solution. They need a coordinated solution that provides affordable accessible housing with support services.

In the early 1990s, the Ontario government acknowledged the need to coordinate these elements to effectively plan and develop supportive housing, and developed an integrated housing and service development process. Unfortunately, this coordinated approach was abandoned and our sector is faced with an impossible task of coordinating funding from a variety of federal and provincial sources

for construction, guarantees from the LHINs for support service funding, and rent subsidies from the municipalities. Failure to secure approvals in one or more areas jeopardizes the viability of the project and its chances for success.

What further compounds the problem is that the population we serve is among the lowest income group, many with annual family incomes of under \$10,000.

The result is that people with disabilities are on housing and service wait lists for a decade or more. Affordability is the number one factor for 92% of our tenants. Nearly half of our residents state that their ability to pay rent is limited to the Rent-Geared-to-Income subsidy. Another 25% of our tenants are limited to the shelter component of their income assistance cheques. Those who have not received RGI are frequent users of food banks and many experience significant financial hardship. Only 2% of our residents have no problem paying market rent.

Let me provide you with a couple more characteristics of our constituency. 85% of our residents identify accessibility as an essential component of finding appropriate housing. Three quarters of tenants require assistance with activities of daily living, ranging from 4 hours each day to 8 hours (and sometimes more).

For most of our residents, remaining in their community is fundamental. More than two-thirds of tenants state that they would

not be willing to move outside their community. Being near family, remaining in the community and having amenities nearby in an affordable unit constitute the major priorities and concerns of March of Dimes NPHC consumers.

Interestingly, the 2015 PanAm-ParPan Games provides a prime example of the problem facing our constituents.

The games have required all levels of government to work together and contribute to the development of new and upgraded facilities, including transit and housing. We were encouraged by the fact that the 2015 Games will leave a legacy of affordable housing on the site of the Athlete's Village. Unlike the Vancouver Olympics, where the use of the land post-games was not part of the initial planning, the committee overseeing the village construction has shown the foresight to plan for the needs of the community post-games and will shortly seek to qualify non-profit housing providers to take over 400 units of affordable housing, including 221 units which will be specially designed to house the disabled athletes of the ParaPan games.

Once the Games conclude, affordability is being planned at an average of 80% of average market rents (AMR), ranging from \$600 for a bachelor unit to \$1,000+ for a 3-bedroom unit.

This is an historic addition to the accessible and affordable housing stock in Toronto. The intensity of the development will also make the

delivery of support services relatively economical, as they can be provided using a community hub model.

Yet, despite the \$1.4 billion dollars of investment in the Games, and the involvement on the Village development committee of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Infrastructure Ontario, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Waterfront Toronto and the City of Toronto, no one can provide assurances that there will be RGI and support services available to accommodate people with disabilities in the accessible units.

In fact, at a recent workshop, non-profit housing providers asked the committee if they would provide an allowance to the successful bidders to REMOVE the special accessibility features because no one believes that without RGI or attendant care, these units will serve the people for whom they were designed.

We raise the example of the Pan Games affordable housing legacy because it epitomizes the coordination issue that is critical to supportive housing and our tenants. We ask the government to announce a guarantee of RGI and attendant care funding for 2015, to protect this legacy and to demonstrate its commitment to coordinated solutions. Bill 140, and the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, should make the need for such a commitment unnecessary to ensure that all future planning that seeks to provide housing solutions for people with physical disabilities is done so with such a coordinated approach.

March of Dimes Canada: Overview

March of Dimes is one of Canada's largest service providers and a tireless advocate for people with disabilities, serving as a resource for all Canadians requiring disability supports.

With a wide range of programs and services offered, many of our consumers utilize more than one of our services to help them gain greater independence. Solutions for independence include employment services, attendance services, financial support for assistive devices, home and vehicle modification funding, peer support for stroke and post-polio survivors, and much more.

Additional copies of this document may be at:

www.marchofdimes.ca/advocacy

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