

January 5, 2006

ONTARIO ANTI-GUN STRATEGY GIVES POLICE AND PROSECUTORS THE TOOLS THEY NEED

The Ontario government is committed to doing everything in its power to get guns off our streets and make our communities safer. Fighting gun violence requires being tough on crime, using strong enforcement and effective prevention, but it also requires taking aim at the causes of crime. Gun violence can thrive in an environment of hopelessness and poverty. Ontario is creating healthy neighbourhoods by targeting investments in better housing, safe schools and after-school activities, and programs for at-risk youths and adults. As part of its anti-gun strategy, the McGuinty government will continue to work with all levels of government and members of the community to find legislative changes and community-based initiatives to end gun violence.

On January 5, 2006 the government announced it is intensifying its effort to fight gun violence with immediate funding for several new initiatives. The government's ongoing anti-gun strategy includes both those new initiatives and the existing programs and initiatives listed below.

Gun-violence Reduction Initiatives:

BEING TOUGH ON CRIME

- **Call for Reverse Onus Bail** — In December 2005, Premier Dalton McGuinty wrote to the leaders of the four main federal political parties, asking, among other things, for their commitment to move as quickly as possible under a new Parliament to amend the Criminal Code to impose reverse onus bail for all gun crimes. This would mean that the accused would have to prove to the court during a bail hearing that they are not a danger to the public or a flight risk.
- **Working with the Federal Government on a Tougher Criminal Code To Deal With Gun Crimes** — The McGuinty government continues to spearhead discussions with federal leaders about amending the Criminal Code to ban handguns, impose a mandatory minimum sentence of four years for illegal possession of a handgun, impose increased mandatory minimum sentences for all gun crimes, create two new Criminal Code offences with mandatory minimum sentences for robbery with intent to steal a gun and for breaking and entering with intent to steal a gun, and set more severe penalties for any breach of bail conditions.

- **No Deals for Gun Offenders** — Crown prosecutors are instructed not to withdraw or plea-bargain firearms-related offences for expediency, absent exceptional circumstances. The Crown must also seek appropriate sentences that will act as a deterrent and, in serious cases, consider seeking sentences higher than the mandatory minimum.
- **Marijuana Grow-Ops Law** — This new law, passed on December 14, 2005, will help police, hydro and fire officials to combat grow-ops, and will see to it that the proceeds of seized assets from grow-ops are spent on enforcement, crime prevention and compensating victims. The illicit drug trade is known to be fuelling the illicit firearms market.
- **Gun Amnesty** — to get illegal guns off the streets. The Project PEACE gun amnesty was implemented by the Toronto Police Service and supported by the Ministry of the Attorney General from November 7-30, 2005. A total of 261 guns, including 33 handguns, and 1,554 rounds of ammunition were collected.
- **Expansion of Toronto Guns And Gangs Task Force To Include Federal Prosecutors** — Ontario and federal officials will continue discussions with a view to creating teams of dedicated provincial and federal prosecutors working together in the Toronto area to take action on gun and related drug crimes.
- **“Blitz” Inspections of Gun-Licensed Businesses in Toronto** — to ensure gun storage and safekeeping standards were being met. Thirty-two gun-licensed businesses in Toronto were inspected. The Chief Firearms Office is now incorporating unannounced inspections of gun-licensed businesses across the province into its regular procedures. Previously, most inspections were scheduled in advance.
- **Ontario’s Witness Protection Program** — improvements to encourage more community members to come forward when they have witnessed a serious crime. The Ministry of the Attorney General is working toward improving short-term protection, and reducing red tape involved in obtaining a new identity and with expediting admission to the program. Ontario’s Attorney General will continue to work with his federal counterpart to improve the federal witness protection plan so that it can work in a coordinated manner with Ontario’s program.
- **Community Impact Evidence** — The Ministry of the Attorney General is implementing new and innovative ways for Crown prosecutors to bring community impact evidence before the courts in seeking tougher sentences. This involves Crown prosecutors developing and presenting evidence to the court about the devastating impact of gun violence on individuals and communities. The newly expanded Toronto Guns and Gangs Task Force will further develop legal arguments to get this type of innovative evidence before the court.
- **Stiffer Sentences** — Expert Crown prosecutors have developed, and will continue to supplement, a firearms prosecution package available to Crown prosecutors as a resource in seeking tougher sentences.
- **Mandatory Gunshot Wound Reporting** — A new law, the first of its kind in Canada, requires public hospitals to report when someone is being treated for a gunshot wound and the name of the person being treated, if known.

BEING TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF CRIME

- **Affordable Housing** — The Governments of Canada and Ontario have allocated \$402 million under the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program to produce 5,320 new units of affordable housing and provide housing allowances for up to 5,000 lower-income households.
- **Better Social Assistance** — The 2004 Ontario Budget announced a three per cent rate increase to the basic needs allowance and maximum shelter allowance for individuals and families who rely on social assistance. These are the first increases to social assistance rates since 1993.
- **Youth Justice Committees** — The Youth Justice Committee program, an alternative to the formal court process that holds low-risk young offenders accountable and addresses issues that may lead to re-offending, has been expanded to a total of 23 communities across the province. The government has also doubled funding for the program over the term of its mandate for further expansion to even more communities in Ontario in the near future.
- **Community Use of Schools** — In the summer of 2004, the Province announced the \$20-million Community Use of Schools program. The program encourages increased use of schools by not-for-profit groups at reduced rates to break down financial barriers and to promote participation in a range of community activities (such as recreation and physical activity programs). The Province signed agreements with all of Ontario's 72 school boards. It is expected that new agreements will be developed and signed for the 2005-06 school year.
- **Domestic Violence Action Plan** — The government is investing \$66 million over four years in programs and services related to addressing domestic violence, including education and training, more money for supports for shelters and second-stage housing, counselling, prevention and strengthening the justice system response.
- **Safe Schools Action Team** — The McGuinty government has appointed a special Safe Schools Action Team to implement new measures to protect students. These measures include province-wide school safety audits, funding for new security devices, creating a bullying prevention program in all schools, bullying prevention training for principals and reviewing the Safe Schools Act. The Elementary and Secondary curriculum includes teaching students social skills and equipping them with knowledge about how to resolve conflict peacefully.
- **Investing in Sport and Recreation** — In 2004 the government launched ACTIVE2010 Ontario's Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity. Funding components include: \$12 million in funding to provincial and community sport and \$5 million for the Communities in Action Fund, which supports physical activity, local sport and recreation initiatives. These programs also help remove barriers that prevent people, such as low income children, from participating in sport and recreation programs. In addition, a \$1 million youth sports campaign known as "Pause to Play" was launched in November 2004 to encourage children and youth to "pause" their video games etc. and go out and play.

- **Pre-Apprenticeship Programs for At-Risk Youth** — Approximately 100 at-risk youth will learn practical skills that will help them find gainful employment.
- **Project PEACE** — The Ontario government provides funding for the Toronto Police Services’ “Project PEACE” which is working with young people and the community to directly target the problem of gun violence.
- **Youth-at-risk Summer Job Initiative** — In 2005, the government provided the City of Toronto with \$500,000 for a second consecutive year for its Jobs-For-Youth program to help about 300 youth from “high-risk” neighbourhoods get summer jobs.
- **Learning to 18** — The government launched a \$1.3 billion Student Success Strategy to improve high school achievement and dramatically reduce the unacceptably high drop-out rate. It included the introduction of legislation that would ensure students keep credits learning to age 18 or graduation, a Specialist High-Skills Major within the high school diploma, dual credits through apprenticeship training and postsecondary courses and expanded co-operative education choices. As a part of the strategy, students are also benefiting from new dedicated student success teachers and board-wide student success leaders, innovative lighthouse programs, class size limits in key courses and upgraded technological education facilities.

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