

Ontario Health Coalition

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Attn: Assignment Editor

LHINs health restructuring bill must be delayed: Ontario Health Coalition

Toronto - The Ontario Health Coalition called for the delay of the controversial Bill 36 - the LHINs (Local Health Integration Networks) legislation. The government appears to be pushing the Bill through very quickly despite deep controversy about many of its provisions. It is anticipated that the government will attempt to introduce the bill for third reading tonight or tomorrow and pass it within the next few days. The speed of its passage is raising questions. The opposition has informed the Coalition that neither the synopsis nor the Hansard of the committee hearings is yet available. The legislation was scheduled to be introduced last night but the government was reportedly forced to delay because the legislation was not yet printed. Amendments and clause-by-clause reading by the committee followed immediately upon the end of hearings making consideration of public submissions virtually impossible.

"This is a major piece of legislation with significant implications for the health care system. This legislation grants major new powers to Cabinet, the minister, and his appointees in the LHINs to order restructuring, amalgamations, closures and contracting out in the health system. The LHINs will be responsible for \$20 billion worth of health care funding," said Bea Levis, Seniors organizations' representative to the Ontario Health Coalition board.

"Our request for meaningful community input into the shape of health policy in our communities has been met with minimal amendments that will neither promote democracy nor ensure adequate public consultation. It is akin to creating new, undemocratic municipalities or school boards and pushing them through before the public knows what is going on."

"The opposition and government proposed over 140 amendments to this legislation, most of which were rejected," noted Natalie Mehra, Director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "Despite the Minister's denial that the legislation facilitates privatization and competitive bidding amendments that would expressly ban these practices were voted down by government members. Amendments that would increase the public accountability of the LHINs and the Minister were also voted down by government MPPs."

"This legislation must be delayed pending proper public consultation and an open and honest debate about the strategic plans of the Health Minister," concluded Natalie Mehra. "We are planning cross-province protests with bulldozers and steamrollers to symbolise our deep concerns about the undemocratic process and the implications of this legislation."

The Coalition has released an outline and analysis of the amendments to the legislation available at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca