

Ontario Health Coalition

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January 23, 2008

Attn: Assignment Editor

Health Coalition Applauds Temporary Respite for Hamilton Non-Profit Homecare: Calls for Complete End to Competitive Bidding

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition applauded Health Minister George Smitherman's announcement cancelling the bidding process that threatened to wipe out the non-profit VON's and St. Joe's ability to provide Hamilton homecare after approximately 100 years of service. But the coalition is seeking a clear announcement from the Minister of Health of a complete end to competitive bidding across the province. The coalition is going ahead with planned protests this week, organized in solidarity with the homecare patients and providers in Hamilton. The coalition will give the Minister credit for this first step but is calling for the end to this damaging policy.

Protests are scheduled:

Guelph – Thursday, January 24, 10 am – outside MPP Liz Sandals' office, 173 Woowich St.

Sudbury – Friday, January 25, 10 am – outside MPP Rick Bartolucci's office, 2 -100 Elm St.

These protests follow similar events held in Sarnia and Thunder Bay, following a massive protest organized by careworkers in Hamilton.

The Ontario Health Coalition is holding a meeting of major seniors' organizations on Friday to discuss next steps.

"Competitive bidding was introduced by the Harris government to axe the grants to the Victorian Order of Nurses and the Red Cross and bring the for-profit multinationals into homecare. It doesn't fit with any of the stated goals of the McGuinty government: it fragments rather than integrates care, turning providers into competitors who refuse to share information. It costs more and leads to all kinds of unnecessary duplication. It has reduced the scope of public coverage, it is a disaster for staffing shortages, it is for-profit clinical health care," noted Natalie Mehra, health coalition director.

"We are cautiously optimistic, but we have been here before. The McGuinty government already had a moratorium on competitive bidding and did not take that opportunity to stop it," added Derrell Dular, coalition board member from the Alliance Seniors/Older Canadians' Network. "We are so pleased that they are listening this time. We hope that the public interest will prevail and competitive bidding will be stopped entirely."

"We are very pleased that the Minister has listened to our concerns in Hamilton. We hope that this is a sign of a serious sober second thought," added Bea Levis health coalition board member from the Ontario Coalition of Senior Citizens' Organizations. "We are looking for a commitment from the Minister to stop competitive bidding completely, all across Ontario, and restore homecare to its rightful place as a public non-profit service."

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