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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Health Coalition Plans Protests Across Ontario As Ford Government Pushes Through New Laws to Privatize Home & Community Care, Stifle Class Action Suits, In Midst of Pandemic & Fails to Take Action on Emergency Staffing Crisis in Long-Term Care

Toronto – Tragically, over the last two weeks there have been several well-publicized deaths of residents in long-term care as a result of malnutrition and insufficient care. The situation is worse than ever, reports the Health Coalition. Yet the Ford government has not taken any policy action to address the staffing shortage across Ontario’s long-term care homes. In six homes, they sent in the military. In other homes, they have left it to the homes to address staffing shortages by forging partnerships with hospitals in some areas, or by using funding voluntarily in an ad hoc way to top up some staffing hours. But there is no requirement to do so. There is no recruitment strategy (like Quebec has done), no permanent improvement to wages and working conditions, no improvement to training regimes. The staffing shortage was a crisis province-wide prior to COVID-19 that the homes did not or were not able to address themselves, and is now a full-blown emergency. At the same time, the government has made a priority of pushing through a home care and community care act and a bill that would limit families’ ability to launch class action lawsuits against private companies, like for-profit long-term care homes. The Ford government is expected to vote down all Opposition party amendments to the home and community care legislation in a Standing Committee on the Ontario Legislature today, clearing the way for Bill 175 to go to Third Reading in the Legislature tomorrow or Wednesday. Under the new rules of the legislature, passed by the Ford government to limit debate and speed up the passage of legislation, the new law could be passed after only 5-hours of debate.

Having already done online virtual protests regarding the government’s failure to act on the key changes needed to save lives and ensure safe care in long-term care (joined by more than 1000 people) that were ignored; having sent an open letter to the Premier that is signed by more than 200 organizations representing almost 2 million Ontarians, and having received no response; having participated in public hearings that were short, with almost no public notice and in which government MPPs cut off presenters, used up time for questions and answers by making long statements and by forcing participants to answer “yes” or “no” in what was supposed to be a public consultation; having watched the Premier making populist sounding statements and at the same time ramping up its efforts to deregulate, remove public governance and oversight, privatize vital health care services while we are in a pandemic and at the same time not making policy and spending the money necessary to deal with the staffing crisis in long-term care:-- the Coalition says it is now taking the extraordinary step of organizing cross-Ontario protests. For those who wish to join the Coalition’s events which are all outdoors: masks are mandatory, all participants are asked to keep 2-metres distance at all times, organizers will try to split the groups into groups of ten that are socially distancing (2-metres) among themselves and then each group will be spread even further apart from each other. Car cavalcades will be an option for those who wish to stay in their cars. People are also encouraged to take photos of themselves with messages to the Premier and post them on social media as a form of virtual protest. A summary of the key issues with the new home and community care legislation Bill 175 is below.

List of Events Wednesday June 24 at noon (unless otherwise specified):

IN TORONTO AT THE LEGISLATURE:

12 o’clock, noon, on Wednesday June 24 ~ On the lawn at Queen’s Park (outside the Ontario Legislature in Toronto) and across Ontario ~ We are asking everyone to keep 2-metres apart at all times and wear masks. For those who want

to, you can join in your car by forming a car cavalcade that circles Queen's Park on the inside lane of Queen's Park Circle from noon until 12:30 p.m.~

EVENTS ACROSS ONTARIO at 12 o'clock (noon) on Wednesday June 24 unless noted: Please wear a mask and keep 2-metres apart at all times. All protests are outside. There will be some car cavalcades also, as listed.

Chatham MPP Rick Nicholl's office, 111 Heritage Rd., Chatham (outside)
Guelph Intersection of Wyndham and Annette outside the Quebec St. Mall (on the sidewalk)
Kingston Teach in by Zoom (video/tele- conference) 7 pm to 8:15 pm.
Register to attend with Harold Pickering at haroldapickering@hotmail.com
Kitchener MPP Amy Fee's office, 4281 King St. E. (outside Tim Horton's)
London/St. Thomas MPP Jeff Yurek's office in St. Thomas, 750 Talbot St.
Niagara MPP Sam Oosterhoff's office in Beamsville, 4961 King St.
Port Hope MPP David Piccini's office, 117 Peter St.
Sarnia MPP Bob Bailey's office, 805 Christina St. N. Point Edward.
Sudbury Site 1 - NE LHIN office, 40 Elm St. (Rainbow Centre) Sudbury Ontario on the sidewalk just east of the main doors to the Shopping Mall. Site #2 - the parking lot in front of the offices of Jamie West MPP Sudbury Riding - corner of Barrydowne Road and Gemmel St. Participants are invited to drive around in the parking lot with signs on their cars protesting Bill 175.
Thunder Bay Mini Queen's Park on James St.
Toronto Queen's Park outside the Main Legislative Building.
Woodstock MPP Ernie Hardeman's office, 12 Perry St.

Bill 175, the new home & community care legislation would gut the existing Home and Community Services Act, dismantle public governance and oversight of home care, hand over the remaining public part of home care to an array of for-profit and non-profit corporations and enable the corporations to contract and subcontract home and community care amongst themselves with no oversight. The law and its proposed regulation set up a new tier of unlicensed congregate care without clear limits and with less protections and standards than long-term care, a serious concern given the spread of COVID-19 in these settings. The new plan would see private home care going into public hospitals, and even enables private for-profit hospitals to expand into the new tier of unlicensed congregate care, among many other changes that the Coalition has expressed deep concern about. A full analysis is available on the Coalition's website. Bill 161, also expected to be pushed through this week, will make it more difficult for people to launch class action lawsuits against private corporations, for example, against for-profit long-term care homes.