



Source: Ontario Health Coalition

March 18, 2019 06:00 ET

Ford Government is Steamrolling Health Restructuring Law Through an “Outrageously Undemocratic” Process Warns Health Coalition: Local Services at Risk

TORONTO, March 18, 2019 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- The Ontario Health Coalition expressed outrage at the process by which the Ford government is rushing their new sweeping health care restructuring legislation through and is demanding public hearings across Ontario.

In the new law, the Ford government has given itself new powers to order the privatization of health care services, along with mega-mergers, transfers, and closures of local health care services including hospitals, long-term care, home care, community care, mental health and addictions services, community health centres and non-profit family health teams and others, says the OHC. In context, the planned restructuring covers 1,800 health care service providers and health care services for approximately 15 million Ontarians, according to the Health Minister’s own comments.

“The legislation has been steamrolled through in a process that is outrageously undemocratic,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director. “The legislation is being implemented before parliamentary debate has even concluded and prior to any public hearings. The government created the Super Agency. It held its first secret meeting. The government dissolved the Boards of 20 existing agencies. Yet the legislation has not even passed. Not only this but all public input and procedural protections that existed in previous legislation have been removed from this legislation which has been subject to no public consultation process prior to drafting.”

The new law was introduced for first reading in the legislature on February 26. A week later it was moved through second reading. It is expected that the Ford government will use its majority to pass a time allocation motion today ending second reading debate. So far the government has not committed to any public hearings. The Ontario Health Coalition is calling for public hearings in every geographic region of Ontario to give the public a say about this sweeping legislation that will impact their health care services. The government could hold as little as a part-day of hearings in Toronto only and try to push through the legislation within a few days thereafter.

“These are the questions that the government has not yet answered about this new law it is pushing through so quickly:

- Why has the Minister given herself expansive new powers to order any health service provider to follow a directive with few limitations? In the leaked legislation it was apparent the plan is to order the contracting out of support services and procurement (undefined and without limits). This could include vital patient support services, diagnostics, whole swaths of health care. What is she planning? Why are there no limits on this over-arching power?
- Why has the government given its appointees in the new Super Agency the power to order mega-mergers, mergers, amalgamations, transfers and closures of local health care services? Why are there no procedural protections (no access to documents and plans, no appeals process, no

requirements that these plans meet any health care planning goals)? What forced or coerced mergers, transfers and closures are they planning to do?

- The Super Agency can order for-profit privatization of health care services. Why is this not prohibited?
- Why is there a clause enabling Cabinet to pass a regulation exempting itself from any part of the legislation?
- Why is the Super Agency completely undemocratic? Why no elections, no open board meetings, no public documents, no procedural protections, no accountability?
- Why are there no principles to guide health care planning? No mention of the principles of the Canada Health Act, no mention of equity, no protections for small and rural services, no requirement to plan for population need for health care?
- How can Mr. Ford claim that he is only impacting health care managers when the legislation is set up to facilitate the restructuring of the majority of health care services for millions of Ontarians, including transfers, mergers, closures, amalgamations of local hospitals, nursing homes, home and community care etc. that will of course result in massive upheaval for nurses, personal care workers and vital patient support services, allied health care professionals and doctors?

These are our health care services. The public has a right to know and this legislation should not be rushed through before people really get a chance to wrap their minds around what the Ford government is planning," said Ms. Mehra. "We are extremely worried that this legislation puts local health services at unprecedented risk."