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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

“It is a New Low” Behaviour of Government MPPs in Home Care Legislation Public Hearings Unprecedented and Unacceptable: Health Coalition

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition is making a formal complaint today regarding the behaviour of three government MPPs in the public hearing into Bill 175 the Ford government’s new home and community care legislation. The Coalition reported that yesterday Ford government MPPs, Christina Maria Mitas, Robin Martin and Sam Oosterhoff on multiple occasions cut off participants who were trying to answer questions in what were supposed to be public hearings by demanding that they answer only “yes” or “no” and not be allowed to contextualize their response, explain, nor in fact, say anything else. The Coalition notes that this behaviour was directed at presenters who were critical of the government’s Bill 175. In the OHC’s decades of experience in public hearings of Standing Committees of the Ontario Legislative Assembly they report that they have never seen MPPs behave in such a way. In addition, the Coalition cited behaviour in which government MPPs cut off the answers in order to disallow participants, including the Ontario Health Coalition, from responding to categorically false statements, including false characterizations of what the presenters actually said, reported the Health Coalition.

“Not only is the new home care legislation, Bill 175, a terrible piece of legislation that would privatize significant portions of the existing public parts of home and community care and gut the law of all existing client protections and public governance,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director. “In addition, we have never heard or seen before MPPs cutting off presenters and telling them that they must answer only “yes” or “no” to trick questions that do not have a clear yes or no answer. It is a new low in what is supposed to be a public hearing, a vital part of our democracy. In fact, the government MPPs in the Standing Committee hearing showed the most contempt for democracy and public input that I have ever seen in 25 years of testifying before committees of federal and provincial legislatures. It was appalling, unprecedented and unacceptable.”

The protection of democratic processes is important, asserted the Health Coalition. They report that after the Ford government changed the rules of the Legislature to limit debate, it pushed Bill 175, which major public interest groups in health care were never consulted about, through First and Second Reading in the Legislature in only 10 business days. After only 2.5 days of public hearings in the midst of a pandemic by Zoom that were conducted in a way that the Ontario Health Coalition has never before seen, with the worst behaviour on the part of government MPPs that the Coalition said that they have ever witnessed, the Bill is scheduled to go for Third Reading next week.

“We fear that all of this is a clear indication that the Ford government intends to railroad through this legislation as quickly as possible in the midst of the pandemic. We are gearing up to protest it in no uncertain terms. This Bill reflects the interests of private corporations and is fundamentally contrary to the public interest,” said Ms. Mehra. The Coalition and many other presenters at the public hearings testified that the Bill is so flawed that they called for Bill 175 to be withdrawn.

The Coalition issued the following briefing notes to correct the record:

- The new home and community care legislation guts the existing legislation and moves virtually all public interest protections, even the definitions of the services covered in the Act, the Bill of Rights, the complaints processes, major public interest powers of the Minister, requirements for provider companies, as well as all of the structures for home care governance, to regulations that never have to pass a vote in the Legislature. It also devolves public governance, publicly-provided care coordination and other public home and community

care services to provider companies, many of which are for-profit, with no public oversight. Despite the claim of Ford government MPPs, the regulations have not actually been released for public consultation. The only documents released were two Appendices containing a “summary” of potential regulations that are not yet drafted. These were posted on a government website for feedback during the epidemic/pandemic. Many interested stakeholders never heard about the posting of these “summary” proposals which are not, in any case, actual draft regulations.

- The new Bill enables Private Hospitals to expand into their new proposed tier of unlicensed congregate care. The Ontario Health Coalition opposes a new tier of unlicensed congregate care without clear definition, no public interest protections, no oversight, and it opposes the potential expansion of private hospitals, all of which are terrible public policy, particularly given the experience of the devastating spread of COVID-19 in congregate settings and the consequences of for-profit privatization.

A government MPP used her time that was supposed to be for questions to the presenters, to make a statement contradicting this and misquoting the Health Coalition, then shut down this section of the hearing, which the Chair allowed, thereby preventing the Ontario Health Coalition and other presenters from responding and correcting the record. This, the Coalition notes, was in a public hearing in which government MPPs are supposed to listen to the public and amend any mistakes or clauses in the draft legislation that may have unintended or negative consequences.