

March 13, 2006

Dear Toronto Star Editor,

RE: "Human rights body needs fixing, not dismantling" article

As a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing human rights for the past 25 years, the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter is delighted to hear the Ontario government's effort to reduce its human-rights caseload. However, we vehemently disapprove of the reforms proposed by the Attorney General, Michael Bryant to remove OHRC's "gatekeeper" status and investigative responsibilities. The elimination of OHRC's gate-keeping role will ensure that individuals who suffer discrimination will be virtually guaranteed no recourse or legal justice.

Studies have repeatedly shown that the individuals who have been targets of racial discrimination most likely belong to other marginalized populations that are already on the receiving end of other multiple forms of inequity. Therefore, someone who experiences racism in the workplace may also be a low-income, single mother, a disabled person or a new immigrant to our Province. Shifting the onus onto an individual victim will further magnify the sufferings and traumatic ordeals for societies' most vulnerable groups.

Under the proposed changes by the Attorney General of Ontario, a sexual discrimination victim could be asked to personally investigate the crime scene, file his/her own police report and then to personally seek prosecution in the criminal court system. This hasty proposal from the Attorney General to "improve" the OHRC is not much different for; unless all persons who have been subjected to discrimination have the financial means to investigate, hire a lawyer and comprehend with critical analysis in the complex tribunal process; the perpetrators of discrimination will not be stopped and may even be encouraged to do harm again. This proposal simply can not be allowed to happen.

The Attorney General should be applauded for his attempts to repair the commission. However, any reforms to repair this institution should only take place after a broad and significant consultation involving key community stakeholders. This has not happened yet and it must before any reforms can be put forward to the community for consideration and discussion.

Sincerely,

Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter