

Hansard

Question Period at Queen's Park, Wed. Dec. 7, 2005

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Today we are privileged to have with us Judy and Don Holmes from Ottawa. They are in the gallery here. Their 39-year-old son, Larry, who lived at home until he was 29, is now a resident of an Ottawa group home run by the Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities. The association is deeply in debt. There have been staff layoffs. One home was closed and its residents moved to adjoining properties, decreasing the staff-to-client ratio to what they consider to be dangerous levels. At the same time, they have told me, shutting down the Rideau Regional Centre will put more than 300 high-risk, high-needs people into the community.

Madam Minister, you haven't provided sufficient monies and trained staff to look after people like Larry Holmes. You are evicting 300 residents from the Rideau Regional Centre. Do you have a plan to put safeguards in place before you add to the problems that this family now faces?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Let me say first that we welcome the Holmeses here to the House. All of us as MPPs welcome and treasure the work you have done as parents. We treasure that. We welcome you here to Queen's Park today, and we wish that we had more opportunity to say thank you for that. So welcome to this House.

Let me also say to the member opposite that I hope you took the time to inform the guests you brought here today that this is a long-standing policy which your own party also adopted while you were the government.

Let me also correct for the record that the word "eviction" that you chose to use in your question is actually quite offensive to most of us who have followed this policy for many years. As this member opposite will know, if he chooses to check the books that are tabled in this House so that he can see the financial resources that are attributed to the developmental services sector in our ministry, he will see the significant investments that are --

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Prue: Madam Minister, I don't think these people came all the way from Ottawa to Queen's Park to hear your empty promises or your excuses. The Holmeses gave me a copy of a letter that you wrote to them in 1998, and I quote what you said to them back then. You said you believed that "the primary

objective of government is to ensure that the best front-line services are being delivered. That means making sure the funding reaches those persons who need it most." You went on to tell them that the Conservative agenda has been "especially disastrous to the most vulnerable of Ontarians." But methinks today that the same can be said of you.

Again, I ask you to tell the Holmeses, the other parents, the caregivers, the workers who are here today that you will halt the closure of the three regional centres and invest in the community supports that are essential before you add more people to an overburdened system with huge backlogs and a 10-year waiting time.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I really hope you will take the time to inform people when you bring them here to this House that they should see the history of your government. In 1993, you cut developmental services, which was followed in 1995 by further cuts by the previous government.

In two years of a Liberal government, we have invested almost \$200 million more, not in closing institutions but in community services. The agencies we are working with every day understand that we are moving in the right direction: Millions of dollars for services in the community, including enhanced specialized services for individuals with extremely high needs to serve.

These communities have never seen a government go through this level of transformation, so that we can look to the future with confidence that we will be able to care for individuals in our communities, because that is the important thing for families --

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.