



SEFPO

FRONT *lines*

Information for OPSEU members in the Ontario Public Service • December 12, 2006

Liberal table bill to move public health labs out of OPS

The McGuinty government plans to move the province's public health labs out of the OPS.

Today in the Legislature, the Liberals introduced a bill to create a new Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. The agency, at arm's length from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), would become the new employer for close to 600 OPSEU members who currently work in public health labs.

In addition to lab work, the new agency would be responsible for surveillance, epidemiology, research, and knowledge exchange. It would also play a supporting role in the province's emergency management system.

The government aims to pass the new legislation this spring and have the agency up and running by 2008-09.

"It is not at all clear how moving our public health labs out of the OPS will in any way solve the biggest problem they face, which is years and years of underfunding," said OPSEU

president Leah Casselman. "The various reports that have come out over the last few years have made it crystal clear that the public health labs are drastically short of people and equipment. That's the problem that must be solved.

"Otherwise, the government is just shuffling deck chairs, not steering a new course."

Casselman added that moving public health further away from ministry oversight would not increase democratic accountability.

"We support the integration of public health functions and the creation of the new agency as recommended by several blue-ribbon reports," she said. "That being said, moving the agency out of the Ontario Public Service will hinder accountability, not help it.

"We have seen with previous divestments – the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation comes to mind – that when things go wrong, the Minister responsible has no way to take corrective action,"

Casselman said. "Too often, 'at

arm's length' means 'out of reach.'"

Transfer details sketchy

According to an MOHLTC briefing document made available to lab workers this morning, the ministry is "not recommending or anticipating any job loss" and is "not recommending any closure of regional public health labs."

The ministry says that "in principle" MOHLTC employees who transfer to the proposed agency would be able to stay with their current pension plan, OPTrust. But the ministry also notes that many such details would have to be arranged with the new agency after it comes into existence.

"The last decade has given us a lot of experience with exactly these kinds of transfers," said Casselman. "If a transfer occurs, we know what to do."

Please turn to page 2

The union has convened a working group of lab workers and OPSEU staff to analyze the bill and craft a strategy for dealing with it. Committee members have already met by conference call and will be doing outreach to members at each lab soon.

“In a situation like this, the immediate priorities for us are 1) to understand what is happening; 2) to communicate with our members; and 3) to take action to protect our members’ best interests and the community at large,” said Casselman. “The union will be doing all three as we move into the new year.”

Working group members so far are:

Patrick Fry-Smith (Ministry Enforcement and Renewal Committee co-chair)
(905) 383-9838; pfry@metrocity.com

Sal Dost (Local 113, London)
(519) 455-9310; sal_dost@hotmail.com

Jessica Landon (Local 154, Windsor)
(519) 969-4341; jnljeo@sympatico.ca

John Guitar (Local 201, Hamilton)
(905) 385-5379

Mary Blodgett (Local 308, Peterborough)
(705) 743-6811, mblodgett@cogeco.ca

Melanie Desjardins (Local 314, Orillia)
(705) 325-7449; dannymel@sympatico.ca

Dean Wiley (Local 545, Toronto & MERC)
(416) 235-6135; wileyde@rogers.com

Anne Mantha (Local 649, Timmins)
almantha@hotmail.com

Clay McKibbon (Local 716, Thunder Bay)
(807) 622-6449; opseuclay@shaw.ca

Nancy Pridham OPSEU Executive Board
(416) 407-4594; npridham@opseu.org

Patty Rout OPSEU Executive Board and chair,
OPSEU Sector 10 (Hospital Professionals)
(905) 439-8044; prout@opseu.org

Working group members for Locals 412 (Ottawa), 432 (Kingston), 601 (Sault Ste Marie), and 628 (Sudbury) will be named soon.