

September 11, 2003

Open Letter

Hon. Ernie Eves
Leader of Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario
120 Adelaide Street West, Suite 2020
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 1T1

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Leader of Ontario Liberal Party
10 St. Mary, Suite 210
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 1P9

Hon. Howard Hampton
Leader of Ontario New Democrats Party
33 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1N1

Dear Leaders:

Re: Accessibility Issues of Candidates' Campaign offices and Constituency Offices

We wish to draw your immediate attention to an issue of accessibility—or lack of it—that confronts our deaf, deafened and hard of hearing across Ontario. Most candidates' election campaign offices and MPPs' constituency offices, both Queen's Park and in their ridings are not equipped to meet the communication needs of our consumers. Most do not have TTYs (telephone devices for deaf and hard of hearing persons and other individuals with disabilities (i.e. speech impaired), nor are the services of sign language interpreters or real-time captioners provided when deaf, deafened and hard of hearing constituents want to communication with their candidates and elected representatives.

As you may, Ontario Election have arranged with the Canadian Hearing Society for the provisions of sign language interpreters when deaf or hard of hearing voters require. Our Ontario Interpreter Services makes them available to voters across Ontario on a first-come, first-served basis. Also, Ontario Election provides TTY services. Ontario Election have distributed their brochures to make Ontario eligible voters who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing persons, aware of these services available to them.

The reality of people being unable to communicate clearly with their candidates and MPP violates Ontario Human Rights legislation, as well as the Supreme Court of Canada's 1997 Eldridge decision. The government and political parties must demonstrate leadership and promote accessibility for all its citizens by its own example. We are

acknowledged of all of the parties have supported strong, effective and enforceable of Ontarians with Disabilities Act in the past and today. It strikes us as painfully ironic that the government believes in voluntary measures to meet the needs of disabled people, yet its own actions do not reflect this philosophy.

Coincidentally, there will be the fourth week of the Month of September the World Federation of the Deaf's International Deaf Awareness Week. In order to assist us prepare with your responses which will be shared and you will receive our grading report in our CHS press release, I look forward to your written response outlining the steps that have been taken to correct this inequity and the violation of basic democratic rights of deaf, deafened and hard of hearing Ontarian voters. We need your written responses to this letter by September 19, 2003.

I look forward to your prompt reply. Your clarification is necessary to assist our regional staff in dealing appropriately with the many deaf, deafened and hard of hearing constituents and voters who require special communication accommodations in order to communicate with election campaign, constituency and Queen's Park staff, candidates and MPPS. We are sure you join is in wanting to alleviate the anxiety felt by our consumer communities, caused by this serious breach in accessibility. We would be happy to assist in providing educational and training for MPPS to help them become accessible.

Please visit our website for details on Get Connected to Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing People: A Guide for Service Providers and Businesses at <http://www.chs.ca/info/access/busguide/eng1.html> and please have your staff contact Gary Malkowski, CHS Director of Consumer and Government Relations to discuss these issues further and communication accommodation arrangements for the purchase of communication accommodations, services and awareness training provided by the Canadian Hearing Society throughout across Ontario.

Sincerely,

Kelly Duffin
President and CEO

Cc: Gary Malkowski, Director, Consumer and Government Relations