

**Liberal Government forms Majority  
What does it mean for the Deaf Community?**

**By Chris Kenopic, OAD Executive Director  
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On October 2, 2003 the Liberal Government painted the province red, sweeping away the Common Sense Revolution mandated by the Progressive Conservative Party.

What does this mean for us in the Deaf Community? Actually, it does not mean much in my opinion. Everyone has an opinion as to the views of a specific government elected to lead.

For the past 8 years OAD has written several letters to different Ministers responsible for Education, Culture, Transportation, Children, and Community Service. I must admit that the Conservatives were somewhat good at responding to our letters, although the average wait was about 4 to 6 months per letter.

Below are some examples of what has been done and/or what needs to be done. Of course this is only a summarization of a few selected issues. Had I typed everything that we have communicated between OAD and the government it would become a book.

**Infant Hearing Program:**

In regards to making sure parents of Deaf infants are provided information about ASL and Deaf Culture the government listened and implemented the Infant Hearing Program that is now in place all over Ontario. This led to the possibility of the Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf getting funds to set up the Early Years Deaf Consulting Services funded by the Ministry of Health and the ASL and Literacy Training Program funded by the Trillium Foundation.

We intend to continue pushing the government to ensure they provide permanent funding to OCSD to maintain their program.

**ASL/ LSQ as a Language of Instruction at the Provincial Schools for the Deaf:**

We know that there is a Law recognizing ASL/LSQ as a Language of Instruction for the Provincial Schools for the Deaf. What is missing is that there are no regulations to enforce it. We have written to the Ministry of Education about this gap for the past 8 years.

We hope this will be possible with the new government within the next 6 months to pass these long overdue regulations. This will improve the quality of ensuring teachers of the Deaf are fluent in ASL, and among other things, ensure that Deaf children get the top-notch education that they so deserve.

### **School Boards and Post-Secondary Education:**

In the area of education, this has been somewhat of a challenge. We have written requesting that the government set the standards for School Boards and Post-Secondary Programs to ensure that qualified ASL/Spoken English interpreters are hired. The government supported this concept but they felt that the responsibility falls on the School Boards and Post-Secondary Programs themselves.

Of course, OAD knew this would not be a workable solution. So this is one matter we hope the new government will support...the establishment of proper standards for all School Boards and Post-Secondary Programs to follow when contracting interpreters.

### **OIS After Hours Interpreting Services:**

Back in 1997 OAD led in getting the Canadian Hearing Society to write a proposal to establish an after hours interpreting service for health and mental health related situations. After a lengthy negotiation between the government and CHS with continued support from OAD, the service has finally been established.

We continue to ask for more funding to expand and ensure this service covers all areas of Ontario.

### **Ontarians With Disabilities Act:**

The passing of Bill 81 an Ontarians with Disabilities Act has not been widely supported by the disabled community. The main reason is because it's municipality-based. What we wanted was an ACT that would establish standards all across Ontario rather than individual municipalities.

The new government committed they would remove this Act (Bill 81) and introduce a new one that would include all 11 principals supported by the Ontarians With Disabilities Act Committee. This committee represented over 1.5 million disabled people across Ontario. OAD has been very involved in working with them since 1993.

With standards set, we predict the barriers in employment, education, transportation, etc., experienced by Deaf people will be removed. It looks good but we need to wait and see how it transforms into reality.

This is a brief overview of the OAD's experience with the past government and what we expect from the new government. As always we will keep the community informed by printing articles in the OAD News and [www.deafontario.org](http://www.deafontario.org) website.