

November 4, 2005

## ONTARIO ANTI-GUN STRATEGY IS TOUGH ON CRIME, TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF CRIME

The McGuinty government is committed to doing everything in its power to get guns off our streets and keep our communities safe. Fighting gun violence requires being tough on crime, using strong enforcement and effective prevention, but it also requires taking aim at the causes of crime. Gun violence can thrive in an environment of hopelessness and poverty. Ontario is creating healthy neighbourhoods by targeted investments in better housing, safe schools and after-school activities, and programs for at-risk youths and adults. As part of its anti-gun strategy, the McGuinty government will continue to work with all levels of government and members of the community to find legislative changes and community-based initiatives to end gun violence.

### Gun-violence reduction initiatives:

#### BEING TOUGH ON CRIME

- **Gun Amnesty** — to get illegal guns off the streets. The Project PEACE gun amnesty is to be implemented by the Toronto Police Service between November 7-30, 2005.
- **Toronto Guns and Gangs Task Force** — recently expanded by the Attorney General in October 2005 to include an additional 32 Crown prosecutors and 26 experienced police officers. The police officers and Crowns on the task force work together from day one of an investigation.

The Crowns provide early legal advice to police, especially on search warrants or other issues arising from an investigation. They will also, where appropriate, get legal authorization for the police to conduct wiretaps. After charges are laid by police, the Crowns prepare and conduct the prosecutions.

- **“Blitz” Inspections of Gun-Licensed Businesses in Toronto** — to ensure gun storage and safekeeping standards were being met. The Chief Firearms Office is now incorporating unannounced inspections of gun-licensed businesses across the province into its regular procedures. Previously, most inspections were scheduled in advance.

- **Ontario’s Witness Protection Program** — improvements to encourage more community members to come forward when they have witnessed a serious crime. We will be streamlining and expediting admission to the program.
- **Community Impact Evidence** — The government is implementing new and innovative ways for Crowns to bring community impact evidence before the courts in seeking tougher sentences. This involves Crown prosecutors developing and presenting evidence to the court about the devastating impact of gun violence on individuals and communities. The newly expanded Toronto Guns and Gangs Task Force will further develop legal arguments to get this type of innovative evidence before the court.
- **Stiffer Sentences** — Expert Crowns have developed, and will continue to supplement, a firearms prosecution package available to Crown counsel as a resource in seeking tougher sentences.
- **1,000 Additional Police Officers** — The McGuinty government has launched a program to help municipalities hire 1,000 new police officers — half of those earmarked for community policing. The other 500 officers will be allocated to six priority areas identified by the government in its fight against crime, one of which is guns and gangs.
- **Mandatory Gunshot Wound Reporting** — A new law, the first of its kind in Canada, requires public hospitals to report the fact that someone is being treated for a gunshot wound and the name of the person being treated, if known.
- **No Deals for Gun Offenders** — Crown prosecutors are instructed not to withdraw or plea-bargain firearms-related offences for expediency, absent exceptional circumstances. The Crown must also seek appropriate sentences that will act as a deterrent and, in serious cases, consider seeking sentences higher than the mandatory minimum.
- **Call for Stiffer Sentencing under the Criminal Code** — Discussions between Ontario’s Attorney General and the federal justice minister are ongoing. Ontario is calling for a general review of the sentencing regime in the Criminal Code relating to firearms and a review of the Youth Criminal Justice Act to ensure that it is adequate in addressing the extent of the problem of firearms-related offences in the young-offender context.
- **Minimum Sentences** — Ontario’s Attorney General has taken the position that current minimum sentences frequently do not act as a deterrent or serve as a meaningful punishment. Discussions involving the provincial attorneys general and the federal justice minister are underway.
- **Marijuana Grow-Ops Bill** — If passed, this new law would help police, hydro and fire officials to combat grow-ops, and see to it that the proceeds of seized assets from grow-ops are spent on enforcement, crime prevention and compensating victims. The illicit drug trade is known to be fuelling the illicit firearms market.

## BEING TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF CRIME

- **Affordable Housing** — The Governments of Canada and Ontario have allocated \$402 million under the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program to produce 5,320 new units of affordable housing and provide housing allowances for up to 5,000 lower-income households.
- **Better Social Assistance** — The 2004 Ontario Budget announced a three per cent rate increase to the basic needs allowance and maximum shelter allowance for individuals and families who rely on social assistance. These are the first increases to social assistance rates since 1993.
- **Youth Justice Committees** — The Youth Justice Committee program, an alternative to the formal court process that holds low-risk young offenders accountable and addresses issues that may lead to re-offending, has been expanded to a total of 23 communities across the province. The government has also doubled funding for the program over the term of its mandate for further expansion to even more communities in Ontario in the near future.
- **Community Use of Schools** — In the summer of 2004, the Province announced the \$20-million Community Use of Schools program. The program encourages increased use of schools by not-for-profit groups at reduced rates to break down financial barriers and to promote participation in a range of community activities (such as recreation and physical activity programs). The Province signed agreements with all of Ontario's 72 school boards. It is expected that new agreements will be developed and signed for the 2005-06 school year.
- **Domestic Violence Action Plan** — The government is investing \$66 million over four years in programs and services related to domestic violence, including education, more money for supports for shelters and second-stage housing, counselling, prevention and strengthening the justice system response.
- **Safe Schools Action Team** — The McGuinty government has appointed a special Safe Schools Action Team to implement new measures to protect students. These measures include province-wide school safety audits, funding for new security devices, creating a bullying prevention program in all schools, bullying prevention training for principals and reviewing the Safe Schools Act. The Elementary and Secondary curriculum includes teaching students social skills and equipping them with knowledge about how to resolve conflict peacefully.
- **Investing in Sport and Recreation** — The government is investing \$5 million a year in ACTIVE2010, to improve awareness of the benefits of physical activity and motivate

people to get active. The program will also help remove barriers that prevent people, such as low-income children, from participating in sport and recreation programs.

- **Pre-Apprenticeship Programs for At-Risk Youth** — Approximately 100 at-risk youth will learn practical skills that will help them find gainful employment.
- **Project PEACE** — The Ontario government provides funding for the Toronto Police Services' "Project PEACE" which is working with young people and the community to directly target the problem of gun violence.
- **Youth-at-risk Summer Job Initiative** — In 2005, the government provided the City of Toronto with \$500,000 for a second consecutive year for its Jobs-For-Youth program to help about 300 youth from "high-risk" neighbourhoods get summer jobs.

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