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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES YOUTH VIOLENCE REVIEW

The McGuinty government has made great strides in combating gun and gang violence since announcing a \$51 million package of initiatives in January 2006. The government has expanded the Guns and Gangs Task Force, hired more police officers, more Crown attorneys, more victim services staff and more probation and parole officers, opened the Operations Centre to provide coordinated investigation and prosecution of gun and gang crimes, unveiled a major crimes court and expanded the OPP led Provincial Weapons Enforcement Unit. The government is doing everything in its power to get guns off our streets and make our communities safer.

Fighting gun violence requires being **tough on crime**, using **strong enforcement** and **effective prevention**, and **taking aim at the causes of crime**. Ontario is creating healthy neighbourhoods by targeting investments in better housing, safe schools, after-school activities, and programs for under-served youths and adults.

BEING TOUGH ON CRIME

- **Operations Centre** — The government has established a state-of-the-art operations centre that better allows for highly coordinated investigations and prosecutions of gun and gang-related offences. The centre, which is now open and fully operational, houses the expanded Guns and Gangs Task Force, Ontario Provincial Police, and probation and parole staff.
- **Expanded Guns and Gangs Task Force** — The task force includes police officers, Crown prosecutors and staff from the Victim/Witness Assistance Program who work together from the first day of an investigation. The Crown prosecutors provide early legal advice to police, especially on search warrants or other issues arising in an investigation. They also, where appropriate, get legal authorization for the police to conduct wiretaps. After charges are laid by police, Crown prosecutors prepare and conduct the prosecutions. The McGuinty government has expanded the task force three times since October 2005 for a total of 72 Crown prosecutors and their support staff, and 12 victim/witness service staff. In addition, Ontario and federal officials will continue discussions with a view to creating teams of

dedicated provincial and federal prosecutors working together to take action on gun and related drug crimes.

- **Major Crimes Courts** — The province is establishing Major Crimes Courts designed to increase the criminal justice system's capacity to respond to large-scale, gun and gang-related prosecutions. The first major crimes courtroom, located at 361 University Avenue in Toronto, is now ready for use. The second, located at 2201 Finch Avenue West in Toronto, is expected to be ready by fall 2007. The courts will be equipped with higher levels of security and be capable of dealing with multiple defendants. Three new judges have been appointed to deal with the anticipated increase in the volume of work.
- **Calling on Federal Government** — The Ontario government called on the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to:
 - implement mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes
 - impose a reverse onus for bail for all gun crimes.

The federal government has recognized the need to toughen sentences at Ontario's suggestion. Proposed federal legislation would also create two new Criminal Code gun theft offenses — "robbery with intent to steal a gun" and "breaking and entering with intent to steal a gun," and impose a reverse onus for bail for all gun crimes.

We continue to call on the federal government to maintain the **federal gun registry** and move as quickly as possible to amend the Criminal Code to:

- implement a **handgun ban**
- set more **severe penalties for breach of bail** conditions

Bills C-10 and C-35, based largely on Ontario's recommendations, have now passed the House of Commons and are before the Senate.

- **No Deals for Gun Offenders** — Ontario Crown prosecutors are instructed not to withdraw or plea-bargain firearms-related offences unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Crown must also seek appropriate sentences that will act as a deterrent and, in appropriate cases, consider seeking sentences higher than the mandatory minimum.
- **Bail Blitz Teams** — The province has established bail blitz teams, which consist of police, Crown prosecutors and duty counsel working together to expedite the bail court process at certain sites for criminal cases, including those involving guns. Teams are working at College Park Courthouse and Old City Hall Courthouse in Toronto and at the Ottawa Courthouse.
- **Community Impact Evidence** — The Ministry of the Attorney General is implementing new and innovative ways for Crown prosecutors to seek

tougher sentences by developing and presenting evidence to the court about the devastating impact of gun violence on individuals and communities.

STRONG ENFORCEMENT

- **Expanded Provincial Weapons Enforcement Unit (PWEU)** — In January 2006, the McGuinty government announced that an additional 15 OPP officers would be assigned to the PWEU. They have been recruited, for a total of 58 officers in the unit.

PWEU is dedicated to identifying and taking action against the illegal movement of firearms, ammunition and explosives, including smuggling, trafficking, and possession of “crime guns.”

- **Funding for Policing in High-Priority Areas** — In January 2006, the McGuinty government provided \$5 million to the Toronto Police Service to support its offensive against gangs in high-priority areas of the city. This effort included the establishment of the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) – three rapid response teams each consisting of 18 highly trained police officers, specializing in drugs and guns interdiction to work on TAVIS.

To date, Toronto police have seen tremendous results following the implementation of their program, including more than 6,600 arrests, the seizure of nearly 370 guns and establishing more than 38,000 business and community contacts.

- **Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy** — The government has launched a hugely successful intelligence based anti-violence strategy which addresses gang activities and weapons use. The program was launched in Toronto and in June 2007 expanded to communities across the province, including Hamilton, Windsor, London, Ottawa, Waterloo, Peel, Thunder Bay and Kenora. It was also recently expanded to the Entertainment District. The establishment of joint forces teams, integrated with the Guns & Gangs Task Force, that are not confined by jurisdictional boundaries has led to increased information sharing and co-ordination of investigations and enforcement.
- **1,000 Additional Police Officers** — Under the Safer Communities – 1,000 Officers Partnership program, 1,000 police officers, including 250 in Toronto, have been hired.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION

- **Additional Probation and Parole Officers** — The government has hired a manager, two support staff and 12 new probation and parole officers working at the Operations Centre conducting risk assessments on individuals accused of offences related to guns and gangs.

- **The Centre of Forensic Sciences** — The government has increased funding to the centre to expand its capacity to perform ballistics testing and forensic analysis.
- **Gun Amnesty** — The Project PEACE gun amnesty was implemented by the Toronto Police Service and supported by the Ministry of the Attorney General from November 7-30, 2005. A total of 261 guns and 1,554 rounds of ammunition were collected.
- **“Blitz” Inspections of Gun-Licensed Businesses in Toronto** — The government funded a blitz inspection of 32 gun-licensed businesses in Toronto in September 2005, 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** — The program has been improved to encourage more community members to come forward when they have witnessed a serious crime. The Ministry of the Attorney General has improved short-term protection, and reduced the red tape involved in obtaining admission to the program and receiving a new identity. The Attorney General will continue to work with his federal counterpart to improve the federal witness protection plan so that it can work in a coordinated manner with Ontario’s program.

TAKING AIM AT THE CAUSES OF CRIME

- **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 46 communities across the province. More than 80 per cent of the participants have had no further contact with the justice system within one year of completion.
- **Youth Intervention Centres** — Since April 2006, the government has established an additional 14 youth intervention centres for a total of 29 across the province. The centres provide structured and closely supervised programs where youth in conflict with the law accept responsibility for their actions, and develop anger management, learning, employment and other life skills to help reintegrate them into their communities.

- **African Canadian Youth Justice Program** — In May 2006, the Ontario government, in partnership with the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC), launched an innovative new program to reduce youth offending and help youth in conflict with the law, aged 12 to 17, achieve better outcomes through appropriate community-based, culturally-sensitive services and referrals. Operating out of four Toronto-area youth court locations, the program offers both court workers and reintegration social workers to assist youth in accessing community supports and resources, including counselling and mentorship opportunities.
- **Youth Opportunities Strategy** — The government is investing \$28.5 million over the first three years of the strategy to improve outcomes for youth in under-served communities. In 2006, the strategy was implemented primarily in Toronto neighbourhoods. In 2007, the government is spending \$11 million to expand the strategy to additional under-served communities in municipalities across the province, including Windsor, Ottawa, London, Hamilton and Thunder Bay.

The strategy includes the following five components:

- **Summer Jobs For Youth Program** — In 2006, this program provided summer jobs for 800 youth from under-served neighbourhoods in Toronto. The program includes pre-employment readiness and post-employment supports as well as employment placements in a variety of fields including business, recreation and youth leadership. In summer 2007, the program will expand to include 1,650 youth from under-served communities across the province.
- **Youth Outreach Worker Program** — This program currently employs 39 youth outreach workers (35 in Toronto and four in Durham Region) who are building relationships with hard-to-reach youth, providing advice and connecting them to appropriate services in their communities. In 2007, an additional 23 outreach workers will be hired to work in other under-served communities across the province, bringing the total to 62 outreach workers in Ontario.
- **Youth in Policing Initiative** — In summer 2006, 100 youth from under-served communities in Toronto worked with the Toronto Police Service in a range of areas to develop skills relevant to a possible future career in policing. Five additional youth worked with the Durham Regional Police in a similar program. In summer 2007, the initiative will expand to enable at least 60 more youth to work with other police service organizations across the province.

- **YouthConnect.ca** — The government's new website, YouthConnect.ca, provides a forum for young people to access information, services and resources that will help them make good choices, achieve success and contribute positively to their communities.
- **School-based Prevention/Diversion Program** — This partnership among schools, school boards, community-based agencies and police helps high school students under 18 years of age, who are at risk of becoming involved or are already involved in offending activity, increase their chances of school success. Trained peer mediators and school and community staff work together with students to address issues leading to offending behaviour, develop new skills, increase school attachment and take on leadership roles. The program is being delivered in 12 communities across the province in 2006-07. In 2007-08, the program will be offered in six additional communities bringing the total to 18 communities.
- **Down with Guns Program** — The government has directed \$3 million in grants to a community-designed initiative that is being led by the African-Canadian Christian Network in partnership with the Toronto Community Foundation. This youth anti-violence strategy is focused on four key areas: family, education, employment and crime prevention.
- Four volunteer action committees are involved in ensuring these goals are met. Parents, educators, artists, law enforcement officials and many other expert volunteers are also involved in this initiative. On December 11th, 2006, 10 community organizations received a total of \$533,000 to support their work helping young people lead lives free of violence. On May 3, 2007, 21 successful second round applicants were advised that they will receive funding.
- **Youth Challenge Fund** — The Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) is an innovative public and private sector initiative that makes investments in community projects that offer positive opportunities for young people growing up in Toronto's most under-served neighbourhoods. YCF makes direct, grassroots investments in youth-based initiatives that are aimed at building great ideas, creating youth spaces and providing opportunities for education, employment and leadership.

YCF took an important step forward on December 14th, 2006 by announcing a total of \$3.5 million in its first round of investments for youth-based projects. The funding will support youth initiatives led by 19 organizations working in the city's 13 priority neighbourhoods. On April 17, 2007, the Youth Challenge Fund announced over \$4.4 million of funding for their second round of investments for 26 organizations.

- **Safe Schools Strategy** — The Safe Schools Action Team was established by the McGuinty Government as part of its commitment to review a full range of school safety policies and practices, including the safe school provisions of the *Education Act*. The government has committed \$26.2 million in funding to help make schools safer. A portion of this included funding of \$7.83 million to school boards for bullying-prevention programs: \$1,500 per elementary school and \$2,000 per secondary school, along with \$3 million in funding for security access devices.
- **Kids Help Phone** — The government entered into a three-year, \$3-million partnership with Kids Help Phone, which will double the help line's capacity to provide anonymous counselling to students in Ontario who are dealing with bullying issues. In 2006 alone, Kid's Help Phone counsellors received and responded to 2,868 phone calls related to bullying from Ontario youths. This is an increase of 101% over 2005. Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24-hour, seven-day-a-week toll-free, anonymous referral and counselling service. Services are available to children and youth in English and French by calling the toll free phone number or through online web counselling. Information materials, including posters and wallet cards to inform students about the Kids Help Phone, have been provided to school boards.
- **Leave Out Violence (LOVE)** — A special project grant was provided to LOVE to provide outreach and support to school children and youth in high-risk neighbourhoods. Youth leaders are being trained to become peer mentors and will conduct presentations in schools to help empower youth and children to take a stand against the violence that has penetrated their communities and prevent re-victimization.
- **Learning to 18** — To improve students' achievement in high school and increase graduation rates, the government launched its \$1.3 billion Student Success Strategy. It included the introduction of legislation that would ensure students continue to learn to age 18 or graduation; new Specialist High-Skills Majors within the high school diploma; opportunities for students to earn dual credits through college, apprenticeship and postsecondary courses that count toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma; and expanded cooperative education choices. As part of the strategy, students are benefiting from additional teachers dedicated to student success in every secondary school, innovative lighthouse programs, credit recovery programs, a strategic high school transition plan for struggling Grade 8 students and upgraded technological education equipment and facilities.

- **Apprenticeship Training** — Pre-apprenticeship projects for at-risk youth total approximately \$1.5 million over three years. Approximately 140 at-risk youth will have learned practical skills to help them become eligible for apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades.
- **Community Use of Schools** — Since 2004, the province has provided \$20 million annually for the Community Use of Schools program. The program encourages increased use of schools by not-for-profit groups at reduced rates during non-school hours to promote participation in a range of community activities such as recreation and physical activity programs. Additionally, school boards are helping community groups access school facilities more easily by providing application forms, rate schedules and contact information online.

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