



Government Meetings May 4, 2016

On Wednesday, May 4, 2016 the Government Visiting Committee met with several members of the Ontario Provincial Legislature. Representing the Ontario Provincial Council were President Pauline Krupa (ex officio), President-elect Anne Madden, Past President Betty Colaneri, 2nd Vice President/Resolutions Chair Linda Squarzolo and Legislation Chair Carol Richer.

This report is written by Resolutions Chair Linda Squarzolo with the assistance of the other members of the committee who took notes during the meetings.

Since the CWL National Council named May 4th as *12 Hours of Prayer for Palliative Care*, this was disclosed at each meeting. The members of the committee took time during the day to participate in the prayer service prepared by Carol Richer.

Hon. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan), Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry welcomed the committee. Hon. Mauro is very familiar with the League work and is always willing to meet with the CWL. Pauline Krupa led the discussion and introduced the topic of the "Ring of Fire" and its impact on the First Nations in the area. He explained that this project is taking time because the government wants to do it right. It includes a vast area with many mineral deposits and can have serious impacts on the environment. He identified other aboriginal issues including the suicide crisis in Attawapiskat, the report on schools, land claims and that more than one hundred communities lack safe drinking water. Premier Kathleen Wynne has a will to resolve these problems. Some reserve issues are the same as other remote communities.

The committee stated the League's pro-life stance and the concerns regarding doctor-assisted suicide.

France Gelinás (*Nickel Belt*), NDP Critic for Health and Long-term Care and also Aboriginal Issues was introduced to the members of the committee and information about the League. She has been very supportive of League members in her riding and willing to meet them. She was surprised to learn that there were 46,000 members across the province. Discussion topics were introduced by Linda Squarzolo.

Ms Gelinás introduced a private member's bill to ban the use of tanning beds for those under the age of 18. Legislation was adopted because of her action. She was commended for her work, since this was also a CWL resolution.

Mental Health issues were discussed since this was "Mental Health Week" and related to resolutions 2015.01 "Increased Early Intervention and Access to Children and Youth" and "Reducing the Stigma attached to Mental Illness". Concerns relating to the impact of the lack of immediate services were addressed, as well as the suicide rates for youth in the general population and in First Nations communities. Ms Gelinás was presented with one of the CWL postcards relating to Child and Youth Mental Health.

The issue of the cost of diabetes supplies (Resolution ON.10.02) and medications, in general, was introduced. She noted her concern and the effects on low income groups. The issue has been raised with the Minister of Health but he has taken a firm stand against additional coverage.

Ms Gelinás informed the group that studies are being done on infrared breast screening thermography (ON.12.01) as technology evolves. At present, it is deemed to be non-conclusive and not cost effective.

Colorectal cancer awareness (ON.11.03) was introduced. Ms Gelinás mentioned that although screening tests are readily available, there is only a 40% pick-up rate for usage. She also informed the group that a new test will soon be available with fewer false positives.

When the *12 Hours of Prayer for Palliative Care* was mentioned, it opened the discussion about concerns. She indicated only 75% of patient care in hospices is funded by government and the rest must be provided with fund-raising. She indicated her support for having palliative care fall under the Health Ministry.

First Nations issues were raised concerning the youth and lack of potable water; however, time ran out on this meeting.

Question Period

The committee members were given invitations for the visitor's gallery during Question Period. Hon. Bill Mauro introduced each member to the legislature by name, identified their position on the Ontario Provincial Council and their place of residence.

Wayne Gates (*Niagara Falls*)

The MPP recognized a member of the committee (Betty Colaneri) from his constituency and invited the committee to his office for an informal visit.

Glenn Thibeault (*Sudbury*), parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change

After the committee was introduced, Anne Madden opened the discussions. Two resolutions (ON.15.01 and ON.15.02) relating to the environment were introduced. The ministry was commended for their action relating to microbeads in personal care products and on neonicotinoid pesticides.

Other issues were also introduced, including palliative care and hospice. Anne is a nurse and explained that palliative care begins with the onset of the illness and provides ongoing symptom care. All agreed that doctors, the government and the public need to be educated. Mr Thibeault was familiar with the issues because of family experiences, as a member of a palliative care committee and his wife is the executive director of a hospice facility. In June an announcement will be made regarding \$75 million to enhance hospice services over three years.

When mental health for youth was introduced, Mr Thibeault mentioned that before entering politics he was a behavioural counsellor.

The topic of funding diabetes supplies and medications was mentioned. The discussion led to Catastrophic Pharmacare.

When the next meeting is held with government, it is hoped to include a "meet and greet". Mr. Thibeault's assistant, Rachel, offered to help with the arrangements.

Hon. Ted McMeekin (*Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale*), Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

When arriving for the meeting, the committee was informed that the minister was ill and his Senior Policy Advisor Scott Kirkham would meet with the committee. Betty Colaneri led the conversation. The main issue addressed was housing relating to ON.15.04 regarding the provision of regulated housing for the chronic, severely mentally ill. The committee was told that the government has a 10-year commitment to end chronic homelessness. An expert advisory panel made recommendations on homelessness and include "A Place to Call Home". He stated plans are underway to create rezoning legislation that would require builders to include affordable housing in any new projects. The chronically homeless have frequently suffered from physical or psychological trauma. Over the next 18 months there will be additional spending in this area. There is new funding and the ministry will be looking for partners to help deliver the programs, ones who are active and willing to establish a relationship with the government. As an example he suggested assisting victims of human trafficking being removed from the situation and returned to their families. The hope of the government is to start with helping the most in need.

The League was invited to return in about six months to discuss how the ministry is doing and how the League can assist the ministry to achieve these goals.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles (*Pickering-Scarborough East*), Minister of Child and Youth Services

Hon. MacCharles was detained at another meeting so discussions began with her Chief-of-Staff Omar Raza. The minister and her policy advisor joined the

meeting a short time later. Carol Richer led the discussion and commended the minister for Bill 132, which is an act to amend various statutes with respect to sexual violence, sexual harassment, domestic violence and related matters.

The issues relating to First Nations youth were introduced relating to resolution ON.14.02 (Feathers of Hope – Empowering First Nations Youth) and the crisis in Attawapiskat concerning the youth suicides. Plans are underway to establish a tele-health connection so that the services of a psychiatrist can be accessed in real time through teleconference and a nurse would be present with the patient.

A Family Well-being program is being established to preserve the family unit and offer support before a crisis develops. The worker will develop skills within the family members. Although Aboriginal Affairs is a federal responsibility, the provincial government has become more involved. There is a greater willingness to work together.

Accessing mental health services for children and youth related to resolution 2015.01. The system is being restructured so that parents can find the services they need and doctors can make the referrals. Additional funds have been added to mental health in the amount of \$100 million. All services can be mobilized to provide assistance. The ideal is to promote life and hope.

When the topic of mandatory police checks for the vulnerable was introduced, it was suggested that other methods may need to be developed to protect the vulnerable.

The committee was very pleased with the government visits. Many resolutions of the last several years were brought to the attention of the government. The discussions were friendly, positive and informative. League views were expressed and the committee was given advance information about several of the government's initiatives. A wonderful and worthwhile day!

