



McGuinty Government Expands Youth Justice Committees Province-Wide

Successful Program Helps Youth And Improves Community Safety

ST. MARYS, ON, Sept. 4 /CNW/ - The McGuinty government is expanding the Youth Justice Committee program to eight new communities, ensuring that all 54 court jurisdictions across Ontario can deal more effectively with young people in trouble with the law, Attorney General Michael Bryant announced today.

"Youth Justice Committees work," said Bryant. "They strike the right balance between accountability and community intervention. They hold young people accountable for their actions, but also get them off a path toward serious crime."

The program is an alternative to prosecuting young people who have committed first time offences such as mischief, theft or minor assaults. It brings together teens aged 12 to 17, their parents, victims and trained members of the community to work out an appropriate way for the young person to make amends, such as community service, restitution or a personal apology to the victim.

"Stratford's Youth Justice Committee will help hold young people accountable for their actions, help get them off the path toward serious crime and encourage them to become contributing members of society," said Perth-Middlesex MPP John Wilkinson. "The program also gives local residents a role in improving community safety in the Stratford area."

To date the program has been tremendously successful. More than 80 per cent of the young people involved in the program had no further contact with the justice system after one year.

Youth Justice Committees were first established in 1999 in six locations in Ontario, and expanded in 2001 and 2004, and then doubled in 2006. Now, due to its success, the program has been expanded to Stratford, Goderich, Picton, Napanee, Gore Bay, Parry Sound, Cochrane and Dryden.

"Youth Justice Committees are a meaningful way to involve victims of crime and provide an opportunity for communities to be involved in helping keep their neighbourhoods safe," said Alice Lewis, Director of Community Services, St. Leonard's Society of London. "They hold young people accountable for their behaviour, keep them out of the court system and the path to

custody, and provide them the opportunity to become more productive members of society."

This is just one more example of how, working together, Ontarians are improving community safety. Other initiatives include:

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- Launching the Youth Challenge Fund with chair Mike "Pinball" Clemons, providing \$15 million for community-led programs in the Greater Toronto Area, and \$3 million to support community-designed programs led by faith-based groups offering youth positive alternatives to violence
 - Pioneering a \$26-million state-of-the-art Operations Centre providing for highly coordinated investigations and prosecutions of gun and gang-related offences
 - Opening the province's first major crimes court at 361 University Avenue in Toronto. A second major crimes court is currently under construction at the 2201 Finch Avenue West Courthouse in Toronto and it's expected to open this fall.

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Backgrounder

ONTARIO'S YOUTH JUSTICE COMMITTEE PROGRAM

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The McGuinty government is expanding the Youth Justice Committee program to help keep Ontario communities strong and safe. Youth Justice Committees are part of an innovative and comprehensive approach to holding youth in trouble with the law accountable for their actions, keeping young people out of the court system and out of custody, and helping to set them on a more productive path.

Community Role in Public Safety

The Youth Justice Committee program is an alternative to formal court proceedings and it provides an opportunity for communities to play an important role in improving public safety. The committees are made up of community volunteers, the young person in trouble with the law, his or her parents and the victim, if they want to participate. Together, they work out an appropriate way for the youth to make amends for his or her actions. A local steering committee, chaired by the local Crown attorney, and including police, victim services, probation, Legal Aid Ontario and defence lawyers, oversees the program.

The McGuinty government has increased annual funding this year from \$60,000 to \$70,000 for community agencies to support the Youth Justice Committee programs. Agencies must apply annually for funding after being selected by the local steering committee.

Holding Youth Accountable

Police may refer a youth to a committee before a charge is laid, or the Crown may refer a youth after a charge is laid. In order for a young person in trouble with the law to be referred to the committee, he or she must be prepared to be accountable for his or her actions, be willing to participate in the program and be aware of his or her rights and options. Only lower-risk offences like mischief, theft and minor assaults can be referred to committees. Offenders who do not agree, or comply with the sanctions, may be returned to the formal justice system.

Youth Justice Committee Sites

Youth Justice Committees were first established in 1999 in six locations in Ontario, and expanded in 2001 and 2004, and then doubled in 2006. The creation of these eight additional committees brings the current number across the province to 54 and includes at least one committee in every court district. The new sites are in Goderich, Stratford, Picton, Napanee, Gore Bay, Parry Sound, Cochrane and Dryden.

There are currently committees in Cornwall, Scarborough, Barrie, Port Colborne, Kitchener, Belleville, Brockville, Cobourg, Hamilton, Huntsville/Muskoka, Newmarket (York Region), Windsor, Whitby, Haliburton, Walkerton, Owen Sound, Armstrong, Nipigon, Fort Frances, Marathon, the Region of Peel, Jane/Finch/Etobicoke, Ottawa, Elgin County, Guelph, Lambton County, London, Chatham/Kent, Oxford County, Brantford, Caledon/Dufferin, Haldimand/Norfolk, Halton Region, Lindsay, Peterborough, Kingston, L'Orignal, Pembroke/Petawawa, Perth, Haileybury, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Timmins/Moosonee/Moose Factory, Kenora and Thunder Bay.

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