

Written Submission on Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act 2020, to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly

June 16, 2020

As an Ontarian I have serious concerns about the government's new home care bill, Bill 175.

I am astounded that in the midst of the ravages of a pandemic the Ontario government would even consider a bill that so drastically impacts the present system of home care.

Our province is already struggling to contain the Covid-19 virus in long-term care homes and other large group settings. Much of the suffering of long-term care residents and their families could have been avoided. The government should have heeded the many calls for system reform that were voiced for many years before the pandemic exacerbated the already existing ugly conditions. Those conditions existed for many years. But they were made worse, certainly not improved, by the present government which continued to disregard the many reports, letters, news articles and television revelations that detailed the abuses running rampant in the "homes" of our loved ones.

I am very concerned that the drafting of Bill 175, which is set to completely overhaul the existing home care legislation, has not been subject to adequate public input and scrutiny. Haven't we learned from the long-term care debacle that it is paramount to listen to the voices of key advocates, the families of the patients, health care professionals and front-line workers? Bill 175 appears to be much more interested in the priorities of provider corporations. Most of these providers are for-profit. Haven't we learned that privatization of health care most likely leads to negligence and abuse of the very people who should be our foremost concern?

Bill 175 will diminish public oversight at a time when it is glaringly apparent that we need that oversight. It will allow for the functions of home care that are presently public to become privatized. Why? And why would the government open doors to the expansion of private for-profit hospitals? Why repeal the clauses in the present legislation that protect the public's interests in home and community care? Why get rid of the Patient Bill of Rights and the complaint process? As so many Ontarians struggle with the horrors of long-term care in Ontario it is quite obvious

that a Patient Bill of Rights and a complaint process are crucial to any and all health care.

Why doesn't this government do something to improve the actual problems in home care? My father received home care and I am personally aware of many of the concerns shared by fellow Ontarians. We need improved and equitable access. We need consistency. We need consistency in the scheduled visits and consistency in staffing. We need an end to staff shortages. Bill 175 will do nothing to address these concerns. Different providers providing services under different models in various regions will destabilize the work force and waste public money in the duplication of services. And we have long known that a minimum standard of care is necessary in long-term care. So too it is necessary in home care. A minimum care standard does not exist in the proposed legislation. And what about regulatory inspections? Again, have the atrocities in long-term care not taught everyone the importance of a stringent governance regime and the importance of unannounced inspections and an efficient enforcement system?

Vital public interest protections need to be legislated. Regulations are not sufficient as they can be changed, again without public oversight and without input from our elected members of provincial parliament. The Patient Bill of Rights should be modernized and legislated. Patients need a positive right to access home care. And it is vital that an easier way to register and deal with complaints be established.

The lessons learned in long-term care should absolutely be applied to home care. Has this government not learned the lessons? Or does the government have vested interests in private corporations whose interests supersede those of the people it was elected to serve? Is that why the public has not been adequately consulted? Posting a summary of regulations online absolutely does not amount to adequate consultation. Many people were not aware of this posting and many concerned people do not even have access to online information. While the posting was done in February, a pandemic was declared in March. The pandemic has affected every component of normal living in Ontario. It has most assuredly affected the public's ability to learn about Bill 175. Most of the public knows nothing about this proposed legislation. Bill 175 has been rushed through First and Second Reading in the Legislature in ten business days. Ten days! There certainly has not been time for extensive debate.

We need a proper consultation process about reforming home care. An appropriate amount of time should be provided so that the public and all stakeholders can be adequately consulted.

We must at all costs be sure that we have a home care system that provides appropriate care, safety and dignity to the receivers and providers of home care. This system must be accountable to the public through legislation. We must be absolutely sure not to set the stage in home care for the calamity and suffering that many people are presently enduring in long-term care.

Please withdraw Bill 175. There is a pandemic going on. We do need to reform the Home Care system but only when the timing is reasonable. And reforming the system must include a democratic consultation process in the public interest.

Sincerely,
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