

Thursday January 3, 2008

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier, Province of Ontario
Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park, Room 281
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier:

I am writing to urge your government to support legislation to help protect children in Ontario from exposure to second-hand smoke in private vehicles. The legislation, Bill 11, Protecting Children and Youth from Second-Hand Smoke in Automobiles Act, 2007, was recently introduced by your colleague, David Oraziotti, MPP, for Sault Ste. Marie.

The success of many tobacco initiatives under your government, including Smoke-Free Ontario, shows your strong commitment to the protection of Ontario citizens against tobacco-related harms. However, I am sure you recognize the magnitude of harm that is associated with exposure to second-hand smoke – especially on children. We must go one step further in protecting Ontarians by protecting those who cannot speak for themselves.

I am asking you to support MPP David Oraziotti's private members' bill to ban smoking in cars carrying children under 16 years of age. The 2006 Smoke-Free Ontario Act prohibits smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces, including company vehicles, but exempts *private vehicles*. This legislation would amend the 2006 Smoke-Free Ontario Act by protecting children under the age of 16 from second-hand smoke in private motor vehicles, enforced by the Highway Traffic Act. Recently, Nova Scotia became the first province in Canada to enact such legislation.

At CAMH, we have a broad mandate for preventing and reducing the harm associated with addictions of all kinds. Our services provide care to people who are addicted to tobacco, and our policy and prevention initiatives are premised on the recognition that tobacco remains the most prevalent and harmful addiction in Ontario, across Canada, and the world. In addition to the obvious impact of smoking on people, it is also the most costly form of addiction to the Ontario economy.

According to the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit (OTRU), August 2006, infants and children are more severely affected by exposure to second-hand smoke than adults because they are smaller and have higher respiration rates. New evidence implicates second-hand smoke in sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), childhood cancer, leukemia, brain cancer, asthma and respiratory disease in children. While levels of second-hand smoke in vehicles can be far higher than those found in smoky bars, children continue to be exposed to smoke in private vehicles in Canada and elsewhere.

A new Ipsos Reid poll finds that eight in ten (80%) Ontarians support legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child under 16 years of age is present. Moreover, a majority of non-smokers (86%) and smokers (66%) would support this legislation, and the same can be said for individuals with (82%) and without (78%) children. With high levels of public support in Ontario, legislation to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children warrants the immediate attention of our legislators to protect vulnerable child passengers from involuntary exposure to second hand smoke inside motor vehicles.

As you are aware, CAMH's mission is to improve the lives of those affected by addiction and mental health problems and to promote the health of people in Ontario. With our role in policy development, health promotion and prevention programs for addictions and mental health, and our maintenance of a network of offices and partnerships across Ontario, CAMH can serve as an important resource for your government as you proceed with the implementation of this important legislation. By working in close collaboration with Ontario's Ministry of Health Promotion, CAMH has provided smoking cessation support to thousands of Ontarians, with impressive results. We welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff to achieve this next milestone, and continuing our efforts to make Ontario the healthiest province in Canada.

Sincerely yours,

Paul E. Garfinkel, MD, FRCP(C)
President and Chief Executive Officer

Cc: David Oraziotti, MPP, Sault Ste. Marie
The Honourable Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion
The Honourable George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Howard Hampton, MPP, Leader, Ontario New Democratic Party
John Tory, Leader, Ontario Progressive Conservative Party