



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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Laurie French
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Thursday, November 30, 2017

To: Shafiq Qaadri, MPP (Etobicoke North) and Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Christopher Tyrell, Clerk of the Standing Committee on General Government

Re: OPSBA's Submission re: Bill 174, Cannabis, Smoke-Free Ontario and Road Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, 2017.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) appreciates the opportunity to respond to Bill 174, Cannabis, Smoke-Free Ontario and Road Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, 2017. This additional written submission accompanies the speaking remarks delivered by OPSBA Executive Director Rusty Hick and OPSBA President Laurie French.

Our Association has reviewed the proposed legislation and its education implications such as changes to board policies, procedures, updating curriculum (age/grade information), suspensions and expulsions, input on public awareness and youth/young adult prevention, etc. – some of which were outlined in a letter sent to the Ministry of Education on September 19, 2017. Much of the actions/changes concerning the legalization of cannabis will align with current education and school board practices for tobacco and alcohol that are already applicable to students and employees. The Association participated in stakeholder meetings in late summer and recently attended a meeting held by the Ministry of Finance to discuss site locations for the standalone recreational cannabis retail outlets.

The legislation enacts two new bills, the Cannabis Act and the Ontario Cannabis Retail Corporation Act. It also repeals the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, replacing them with a new Smoke-Free Ontario Act. It also amends the Highway Traffic Act regarding driving under the influence of drugs.

For each piece of legislation, we offer the following comments and questions relevant to education:

Cannabis Act, 2017 (new)

- We agree with plans to support youth, young adults and other vulnerable populations through integrated prevention and harm reduction strategies. This includes allowing police to confiscate small amounts of cannabis from young people (under 19) without bringing them into the justice system and laying charges. What is a small amount? More than 5 grams? How do you measure this?

- Will the education sector be part of the discussion about youth education or prevention programs? How will youth be directed to these programs? Will their parents/guardians/principals/teachers be informed and part of the programs?
- What are the specific details for the implementation date of July 2018? When do school board policies need to be updated and implemented by? School boards often have summer school and we want to ensure we are prepared. We are concerned about the short timelines and the supports needed for all those involved in our schools.
- What will the process include for exemptions of students/staff using cannabis for medical purposes? What authorization will be required for exemptions and how often will it need to be renewed?
- We need to focus on an integrated, incremental and age appropriate curricular approach starting in elementary school regarding drugs and substance abuse. What sections of the Health and Physical Education curriculum will be updated to include references to recreation and medicinal cannabis use? This has been especially reinforced by our northern school boards.
- What changes will be required to the Police School Board Protocol? When would Principals call police about cannabis possession?
- School boards have adult education centres and also support many students to the age of 21. Education outreach and communications need to include these students as well.

2) Ontario Cannabis Retail Corporation Act, 2017 (new)

- We support the creation of a new provincial retailer, overseen by the LCBO. This includes standalone stores and online ordering, that is accountable for the safe and responsible selling of recreational cannabis to individuals over the age of 19.
- We have strong concern about retail outlets being located too close to schools. School boards and trustees must be part of the discussions between the government and municipalities about the locations of the standalone stores. Sufficient notice must be given to the school board and community about a potential site.
- We support the requirement that before final decisions are made, there will be an opportunity for the public to ask questions about the proposed retail outlet locations.

Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017 (new – combines Smoke-Free Ontario Act and Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2015)

- We support the ban of cannabis use in public places, workplaces and motor vehicles.
- We recommend an accompanying comprehensive information campaign.

Amendments to the Highway Traffic Act (amends to consider driving with alcohol or drugs present in the body)

- We support a focus to increase safety around schools and for school crossing guards. OPSBA recently supported Bill 65, Safer School Zones Act that allowed the use of photo radar in school and community safety zones and the ability to reduce speed limits in certain areas.
- We support educating and reminding all drivers to stop (on roads without medians) and to not proceed until a school bus moves or the overhead lights have stopped flashing or when the stop arm is no longer activated.
- The proposed amendments outline that the Lieutenant Governor may make regulations concerning the use of school bus cameras and their footage or photos as evidence when offences occur (speeding through a flashing light or safety arm,). OPSBA recommends a working group be established to fully examine this issue and its implications.

In closing, we want to stress that mental health and addictions are a serious problem in our country and school boards see this first hand in many of our students. Public awareness campaigns need to include evidence-based research regarding neurotoxic effects on adolescent brain development and the link from regular cannabis use.

We strongly recommend that education outreach, training and professional development include this information. Students, their parents, and caregivers need good information to make informed decisions to support a healthy lifestyle.

We look forward to working with all partners to ensure education is included as a key implementation component in the legalization of recreational cannabis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie French". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laurie French
President

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.