

East York Health Unit's Response to Extension of Drinking Hours in Ontario

August 22, 1996

Honourable David Tsubouchi
Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations
35th Flr., 250 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON
M5B 2N5

Dear Mr. Tsubouchi,

I am writing on behalf of the East York Board of Health in response to your Ministry's decision and announcement to extend the hours of operation for drinking establishments in Ontario.

Although such changes are within your sole jurisdiction and therefore are not subject to debate in the legislature, we feel that in light of other initiatives that are currently under review to increase the availability of alcohol such as "privatizing alcohol sales", our concerns are valid and timely.

We are aware of the rationale given for the extension of drinking hours: "to make our city attractive to visitors and tourists" and "to stimulate the economy". However, we have serious concerns when the benefits of extending drinking hours are considered greater than the risks of alcohol use extended to public health and safety for people across all ages.

Every year, several hundred young people are killed and thousands are seriously injured in alcohol-related mishaps of which many involve drinking and driving. Approximately 50 percent of accidents are alcohol-related and constitute the largest single threat to young people. Tragically, these alcohol-related deaths are preventable. The extension of drinking hours in establishments could increase the number of drinking and driving related violations and deaths in light of the cuts made to the RIDE program and local police departments.

The health related consequences of irresponsible use of alcohol includes public violence, crime, and child and partner abuse. Alcohol contributes to cancer deaths, deaths and illnesses related to heart & stroke, liver, brain and damage to unborn fetuses in addition to lost productivity that are estimated to cost \$7.5 billion every year in Canada. The increased use of alcohol will only continue to contribute to soaring health care costs.

Consequently, we strongly recommend a broader review of the benefits for people to be made as well as consultations with health and safety organizations be undertaken when making important decisions that will have such an enormous impact on the health and safety of all Ontarians. The current alcohol policy as it exists, is a reflection that our government is unconcerned. Our government must take responsibility for the large number of deaths and injuries that policies such as this one have the potential to generate.

Sincerely,

Elca Rennick
Chair, East York Board of Health

cc: Honourable Rob Sampson, Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Privatization