

STATEMENT

BY

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**MINISTER OF
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

***Making Progress On New, Enforceable,
Accessibility Standards For People With
Disabilities***

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Speaker,

I rise in the House today to announce the next two steps that the McGuinty government is taking under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* to make Ontario more accessible to people with disabilities.

The members of this House took a strong stand on accessibility just over a year ago when they voted this Act into law in Ontario.

And I'm pleased to be able to rise again in this House today and report on the progress that we're making as a result.

As the honourable members are aware, Mr. Speaker, the Act lays out a road map to make Ontario accessible to all people by 2025. Under the Act, new, mandatory accessibility standards are being developed which will bring down barriers that many people with disabilities face in their daily lives.

The standards will apply to businesses and organizations across Ontario as well as the provincial government. They will address the full range of disabilities, including physical, sensory, mental health, developmental and learning.

In October of 2005, we announced that the first two proposed standards to be developed would cover the areas of transportation and customer service.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the Customer Service Standards Development Committee has agreed upon a proposed standard on accessible customer service.

The draft standard has now been posted on my ministry's website for members of the public to review and submit feedback over the next sixty days. At the end of that period, the committee will be able to make changes to the proposed standard based on that feedback.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, today we begin accepting applications for membership on a third Standards Development Committee. As with the previous two committees, committee members will include representatives from the disability community, the broader public sector, the private sector, and Ontario ministries.

Once assembled, this committee will begin work on a proposed standard for accessible information and communications.

Access to information and communications opens up opportunity for everyone. People with disabilities often find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when they are unable to access information, be it in print or electronic formats. Our expectation is that, once drafted, this new standard will address many of those barriers.

According to Statistics Canada, Mr. Speaker, approximately one point five million people in Ontario live with a disability today – that is more than thirteen per cent of Ontario's population.

And, as our baby boom generation grows older, the number of people who require a greater level of accessibility in order to participate fully in their community, will also grow.

Accessibility is something that we simply cannot continue to overlook.

The progress that I am pleased to be able to announce today means that we are moving in the right direction. We are making real progress towards our goal of having an accessible Ontario by 2025.

To me, an accessible Ontario is one where everyone has access to goods and services and can expect the same great service wherever they go – whether they have a disability or not.

It is one where people from around the world can visit and enjoy themselves while experiencing a level of accessibility equal to, or better than, what they are used to back home.

And it is one where everyone has the opportunity to meet their full potential.

With this strong piece of legislation behind us, and with the co-operation and support of the broader public and private sectors, as well as the disability community, we're going to get there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.