

For Immediate Release - October 16, 2009

**New police complaints system a step in the right direction
but more is needed!**

Scadding Court Community Centre and members of the Community Education and Access to Police Complaints Partnership have been engaged in the reform of Ontario's police complaints system since 2004. We congratulate Ontario's Independent Police Review Director Gerry McNeilly and his office on their launch of the province's new complaints system on October 19.

The province's move to establish a new complaints system represents progress towards a system that is more transparent, accountable and able to meet the needs of its users and stakeholders. "A successful system offers great potential for constructive civic engagement and enhanced community-police relations" says Kevin Lee, Executive Director of Scadding Court.

The Bill 103 Summit took place on September 24 – 26, 2008, was attended by a broad range of community members and system stakeholders from across Ontario and provided a unique opportunity for dialogue about the new system. Its recommendations point toward the need for a complaints system that is grounded in the three pillars of community, police and government. "The three pillar model builds in the communication, contact, consultation, shared ownership and mutual learning that is critical for building trust, policing and ultimately for social stability," says Anita Balakrishna, lawyer and Chair of the Bill 103 Summit.

The degree to which this new system reflects this approach remains to be seen. At present, it does not appear to recognize or reflect the critical role played by communities in the outreach, education and support required to make it accessible and effective for all Ontarians. Outreach and education are key to awareness, understanding and use of the system, however few details are currently available as to how this aspect of the system

will operate. It is our expectation that this will be addressed as the system evolves. Other areas of concern include access for marginalized and diverse communities (language and literacy are among the barriers faced by many) as well as a lack of new options for how and where to file complaints.

Creating a new police complaints system is an important and complex process. It also represents an important opportunity to ensure that everyone in Ontario has equal access and opportunity to provide meaningful engagement and feedback to in the new police complaints system in Ontario.

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