

York Region seniors join MPP rallying against cuts to care



By David Pietrangelo

Aurora and Newmarket seniors, their families, support workers, and CUPE members joined MPP Frank Klees at the Legislative Assembly in Toronto last Wednesday to protest impending cuts to in-house care services.

Mr. Klees was scheduled to question Premier Kathleen Wynne and Minister of Health Deb Matthews about the disqualification of Essential Alternative Community Living (ACL) in York Region.

This move by the Ministry of Health will change the way seniors and those with disabilities receive their immediate care. The on-site help residents are currently used to will be shifted over to a new system that will be controlled by the Aurora-based CHATS? Community and Home Assistance to Seniors.

Early last Wednesday morning, over 50 of those impacted by changes in services, and their supporters, made their way down to Toronto on buses.

By 10.30 a.m. it was Mr. Klees' time to approach Premier Wynne, Ms. Matthews and the Legislature about the ACL matter.

With supporters in the public assembly seats, Klees addressed only Wynne, as the Minister of Health was absent. He asked her directly why this change needs to happen and why Matthews would decide to change an already successful and useful support model, and to appeal the change in senior care.

Wynne countered numerous times stating that the care for York's seniors will continue, but will just be handled by the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and CHATS.

She added that the current seniors under the ACL program are just being transferred to a new service with a change in the delivery. She assured those in attendance that they will receive continued care for those in need of it.

Mr. Klees continued to rebut the Premier and provided examples of York Region residents who will now have to pay thousands of dollars for additional services that were previously provided under the ACL program.

He asked that the Premier do right by standing by the York Region senior population and restore the services.

By the end of Question Period, there was no final change or decision. Unfortunately for those hoping for change, time has now run out to reverse what many feel is detrimental to their wellbeing, as the change came into effect on Tuesday.

After the assembly, those who attended joined Klees in the PC Caucus Room. He personally addressed everyone there and assured them that the fight for their care is not over.

Klees has called for an additional meeting at the Legislature for May 8 to address the matter again and fight for it to be overturned. All those that attended last week are welcome back to show their support.

While in the PC Caucus, a number of seniors and support workers discussed their concerns with The Auroran. Minne Clark and Dorothy Watson, residents at Hadley Grange Senior Apartments on Yonge Street at St. John's Sideroad in Aurora, said they are very concerned about the uncertainty of change in care-giving, but just as worrisome are the relationships that will be affected with the support workers they consider friends.

Both Minne and Dorothy said they love living at Hadley Grange, but hope that the support they've grown accustomed to will return.

Christina Bisanz, Chief Executive Officer of CHATS, echoed the statements of Premier Wynne. She said the care for those that were in York Region's ACL program would not change. The only difference would be CHATS workers that will be on-site, and quality of care would be unchanged. All the CHATS on-site workers are certified Personal Support Workers (PSWs).

Bisanz stated she is personally going from site to site and visiting with the support workers to tailor any necessary amendments to the new program.

She added that the 24/7 on-site care will continue and changes in the program will be as smooth as possible.

Ultimately a change in policy by the Ministry of Health carried forward. To revert back to the ACL and CUPE support program will take some serious work. But, all those who attended Queen's Park and the subsequent meeting with Mr. Klees believe they made a statement to the Premier and Minister of Health.