



ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG
CHIEN DE GARDE DE L'ONTARIO

Opening remarks – André Marin July 16, 2008

For more than three months now, my office has been conducting a pre-investigation to determine whether there is a need to investigate the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's monitoring of long-term care facilities. Although these facilities operate independently of government, the Ministry is charged with ensuring, among other things, that proper standards are set and enforced to guarantee that the facilities' residents are suitably cared for.

Every year, we receive hundreds of complaints about long-term care facilities in Ontario. In fact, just since April 1, we have received well over 100 such complaints. A recurring theme is that the Ministry is simply too lax in ensuring the accountability of these facilities. At the same time, the facilities themselves have complained that they are in a no-win situation, restrained by a straightjacket of piddly bureaucratic rules that have no rhyme or reason but which are imposed on them by the province. For his part, the Premier of Ontario commented last week that we need to do a "better job" of caring for residents of nursing homes.

It is against this backdrop of widespread dissatisfaction with this vital area of public service that I am announcing today an investigation into the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The investigation will explore two issues.

First, we will investigate whether the Ministry's monitoring of long-term care facilities to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and policy standards is effective. The second and closely related issue is the one raised in some corners, especially by business operators who run these facilities, which I call the "ivory tower" issue: Are some of the standards imposed by the Ministry unrealistic, trivial or irrelevant to the extent that they detract from effective compliance monitoring?

The investigation will be conducted by the Special Ombudsman Response Team. I have already received very good co-operation from Ministry officials and am aiming to conclude the investigation in 6 months.