

**Ministry of Community
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MAR 2 0 2009

Mr. J. Raymond Chenier
Chair
Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services Administration Board
210 Mead Boulevard
Espanola, Ontario
P5E 1R9

Dear Mr. Chenier:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Accessible Built Environment Standard and for your support of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*.

In response to your concerns regarding the potential costs associated with the standards, I want to assure you that these issues are precisely the reason the Ontario government is developing the standards under the AODA in phases.

The first area in which a proposed standard has been developed is customer service. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service came into force on January 1, 2008. Businesses and organizations that provide goods or services to people in Ontario are legally required to make their customer services operations accessible to people with disabilities. This will be done by identifying and removing barriers to customer service in such areas as operational practices, policies and procedures, communications and staff training.

As you are aware, other accessibility standards, including the accessible Built Environment Standard and the Information and Communications Standard, are in development. My ministry will continue to provide guidance and assistance to businesses and organizations when the remaining standards are rolled out.

To give businesses and organizations time to implement the requirements of the standard, previous standards have also included a staggered timetable for complying. As an example, the Customer Service Standard states that public sector organizations must comply by January 1, 2010 and all other businesses and organizations are required to comply by January 1, 2012. In future, final accessibility standards, such as the Information and Communications Standard and Built Environment Standard, may also feature staggered compliance dates.

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Additionally, in order to mitigate the financial impacts of making accessibility improvements, the AODA allows for the integration of accessibility improvements into regular business and fiscal planning over time to ensure cost effectiveness. The AODA does not contain provisions for funding accessibility initiatives, but rather, allows individual organizations the flexibility to plan for and implement changes within their planning cycles.

Making Ontario accessible won't happen overnight, but we will achieve results in stages.

Once again, thank you for your input and for your interest in accessibility for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'mmeilleur'.

Madeleine Meilleur
Minister