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Press Release

Ombudsman welcomes regulation of non-emergency medical transfers

TORONTO (June 10, 2011) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin today thanked the Ministries of Transportation and Health and Long-Term Care for acting on his recommendations and committing to regulate the industry that handles non-emergency transportation of hundreds of thousands of patients every year.

In January, the Ombudsman announced an investigation into complaints that the safety of patients was being jeopardized because the industry was unregulated. The Special Ombudsman Response Team (SORT) investigated whether the Ministries had adequate safeguards in place to protect patients being transferred between hospitals, to and from medical appointments, etc. More than 100 stakeholders were interviewed, including medical transfer operators, patients and their families and officials from hospitals, Local Health Integration Networks and the ministries.

“Patients and people within this industry have been calling for regulation of non-emergency medical transfer services for a long time, and with good reason,” Mr. Marin said. “Our investigation uncovered serious issues, from a lack of infection control to unsafe vehicles and poorly trained staff. These vehicles look like ambulances and are often transporting vulnerable patients. People need to know they can trust these services. That’s why I recommended regulation in my preliminary findings.”

Today, the Ministries announced that legislation to regulate the industry will be introduced “at the earliest opportunity.” The Ombudsman will continue to monitor the issue and both Ministries have committed to provide him with regular updates. “We will keep a close eye on the next legislative session to make sure the government follows through on this for patients,” he said.

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