

Speaking notes for

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Community and Social Services

AMCTO Accessible Customer Service Forum
Developing your customer service strategy

March 24, 2009



Bonjour / Good afternoon. Thank you for that kind introduction.

Il me fait plaisir d'être ici avec vous aujourd'hui et d'avoir l'occasion de m'adresser à vous durant cette importante rencontre de votre association.

Customer service is a vital part of the work you do each and every day. And learning how to bring our accessible customer service standard to life will benefit your clients and strengthen your organizations.

I am glad to see you all here today. Your participation is a clear reflection of your ongoing commitment to providing quality service in your communities.

I would like to thank the Association. Your leadership is helping municipalities across Ontario improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

From your work to train municipalities on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2001...

To your more recent initiative to build an accessibility toolkit for local governments.

Your efforts are helping to equip municipalities across Ontario with the tools necessary to break down barriers for Ontarians with disabilities.

Our government values your cooperation as we work together to make the province accessible by 2025.

And you have been a long-term partner for Ontario on this road to inclusion.

It has been said that *the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.*

And that is largely what we are talking about today. Because the customer service standard is our first step towards an accessible Ontario.

And, with each step we take, we are closer to becoming a more inclusive and accessible society.

Accessibility is especially crucial for government... at *every* level.

Because the services we provide are essential for the 1.85 million Ontarians with a disability.

And every one of those people is a “customer” of our services.

A person with a disability can choose where to buy clothing or where to get groceries.

But that person only has one place to go to get their marriage licence, pay their property taxes or register their child’s birth.

That is why we must be a leader when it comes to providing services that are accessible to everyone.

And thanks to initiatives like today's forum, I'm certain that Ontario municipalities will be leaders when the customer service standard comes into force for the public sector next January...

And, as our remaining accessibility standards are implemented in other key areas that make up everyday life in Ontario.

As you know, under our Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, we are also developing standards for transportation, information, employment and the built environment.

I know that many of you have been at the table to draft these standards. And this collaboration is fundamental to the development of our standards and our accessibility legislation.

The public review process gives all Ontarians the chance to help shape a standard that makes sense for *everyone*.

The Proposed Employment Standard is out for public review until May 22. If you haven't already, I encourage you to visit AccessON.ca to read the proposed standard and submit your feedback.

I understand Alfred Spencer from our Accessibility Directorate gave you a good overview of what to expect as these standards come into place.

I have heard from many businesses and organizations throughout this process...

And I know that many of you are concerned about the costs that may be required to implement these standards.

I want to stress that accessibility will not happen overnight.

Our standards are being phased in over time... This will give businesses and organizations the time necessary to build accessibility into their long-term plans.

And accessibility must be integrated into many investments from the province to support municipal infrastructure.

For example, last year the Premier announced a \$1.1 billion-investment that will expand public transit, improve roads and bridges, and build other municipal projects.

Keep accessibility at the top of your mind as you plan how to spend this type of funding.

I also want to emphasize that the proposed standards you see during public review are by no means final standards.

The feedback received during review will help committees finalize their standards to submit to the government for consideration.

One thing that resonates in all the comments I have heard is that *everyone* around the province — and around this room — agrees with our vision to break down barriers for people with disabilities.

Accessibility is simply the right thing to do.

And, as our population ages, it is no longer an option in Ontario — especially for governments striving to serve *every citizen*... and businesses needing to attract *every potential customer*.

By continuing to work together, I am certain we can reach our goal of an accessible Ontario in a way that makes sense for everyone.

This government greatly appreciates your support as we continue to take steps towards fulfilling our vision.

En terminant, j'aimerais remercier chacun et chacune d'entre vous qui travaillez pour faire en sorte que nos collectivités deviennent plus accessibles.

Grâce à vos efforts l'Ontario sera un endroit où chaque être humain sera apprécié pour ses qualités plutôt que restreint et diminué par ses handicaps.

Merci / thank you.

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