



Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades

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An Open Letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty

July 26, 2005

Dear Premier:

We, the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT), an umbrella organization representing over twenty thousand immigrant professionals and tradespeople¹, write to express a number of concerns relating to the priority and policy implications of the shift of the Access to Professions and Trades (APT) Unit from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration², as announced on 29 June, 2005.

We require assurance that you are trying to create a seamless settlement and employment process for immigrants through this move.

We are of the opinion that access to professions and trades is linked to immigration, because it is rightly part of the settlement process or the 'continuum of integration' as PROMPT has put forth in its vision for immigrant access to the Ontario labour market. We believe that this continuum has to be in place from pre-immigration to the settlement of immigrants into 'skills commensurate employment'³.

The bulk of the Ontario budget, announced on May 11, 2005, was allocated for investment in health and education, the latter being partly within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. We want to be assured that the APT Unit will still have the required resources its priority demands, now that it has been shifted from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

We are of the opinion that a substantial part of the APT programs would function more effectively under the education, training, colleges and universities portfolios. A commensurate portion of the large education budget must therefore go towards APT because education (bridging programs and language training amongst others) is an important component of APT. We want to know how much of the \$6.2 billion allocated to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities⁴, will be allocated to policy and program development on access to professions and trades, how those resources will be shared and whether the two ministries will share resources for APT.

¹ PROMPT's member organizations' members combined make up this figure.

² Press Release, Premier's office,

http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2005/06/29/c7145.html?lmatch=&lang=_e.html

³ This refers to employment that is in line with the skills possessed by an individual.

⁴ Ontario Budget, <http://www.ontariobudget.fin.gov.on.ca/bud05e/nre1.htm>

One of our major concerns is: How will this component be serviced if there is no coordinating policy mechanism between the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities?

We are also of the opinion that Ontario's regulatory bodies must participate in the debate on access to professions and trades. Regulation affects immigrant professionals in specific ways. In order then, to facilitate immigrant access to professions, the regulators must be brought in as part of the immigration process.

Further, the APT Unit move effectively creates communication and mandate issues, as the regulators have been cordoned off from us, the advocates of access to professions and trades. As has already been experienced by a few PROMPT members, regulatory bodies have showed reluctance, and on occasion refusal, to negotiate with us since the move of the APT Unit. This situation will only be exacerbated if this issue is not addressed.

In addition, the legal barriers emerging from the experience of immigrant professionals in trying to access their professions will be that much harder to challenge if APT is no longer connected to the Ministry that has jurisdiction over licensure.

In your election platform in 2003 titled 'Achieving our Potential', as well as on several occasions in the past two years, both you and your ministers, including the previous Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities Mary Anne Chambers have publicly indicated your commitment to creating an equitable Ontario, and improving access to professions and trades.

Just earlier this year in January 2005, Minister Chambers proclaimed, "Newcomers arrive on our province's doorstep with immense skills, knowledge and experience. We must capitalize on the tremendous benefits internationally trained individuals bring by helping them integrate more rapidly into our workforce, and strengthening our economy."⁵

In the context of this often reiterated public commitment towards access to professions and trades for immigrant professionals, it is a serious concern for PROMPT members that there exists a dichotomy between this public commitment and the shift of the APT unit to a Ministry that has limited resources, has no links with education, has no links with the regulatory bodies that regulate access to these professions and has no specific budget for APT, as far as we know.

We believe this creates a policy vacuum. We feel your commitment to an equitable Ontario seems to be seriously undermined by this move.

We foresee that the high unemployment and under-employment levels in the immigrant professional community at present will continue to be exacerbated unless we take an integrated multi-dimensional approach. Our suggestion is that this approach must involve three ministries - the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the newly created Ministry of Research and Innovation, in order to bring policy coherence.

⁵ Canada News Wire,
http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2005/01/26/c7076.html?lmatch=&lang=_e.html

This integrated approach must ensure that programs funded for access to professions and trades are outcome related and equitable, because barriers faced by immigrant professionals are multiple and cut across all three ministerial jurisdictions. The outcome of this approach must be, in our opinion, the integration of immigrants with professional backgrounds into the Ontario labour market, at a 'skills commensurate level'.

As APT issues are inter and intra-jurisdictional, we strongly suggest the creation of a multi-stakeholder secretariat that would act as a centralized mechanism to evaluate policy coherence and offer concrete suggestions towards positive change. PROMPT put forward this position in its policy paper 'In the Public Interest: Immigrant Access to Regulated Professions in Today's Ontario' launched in July 2004. We are of the opinion that immigrants must be represented at this multi-stakeholder secretariat.

We support the idea of the newly created Ministry of Research and Innovation, which you will head. We believe that highly qualified and skilled immigrant professionals bring innovation and if harnessed properly, will be the driving force behind Ontario's, and Canada's, success in a global world. As you said upon the launch of your new cabinet, "the most valuable commodity is a new idea – one that creates investment and jobs⁶". We hope that the role of your newly created Ministry of Research and Innovation will not be focused in its entirety on technological advancement but also on policy advancement.

We envision that for the sustainable development of Canadian society, integrating Canada's immigrant professionals into the Canadian economy is crucial. Immigrants bring global knowledge, experience and the potential for innovation. In our view, simply shifting the APT unit from one ministry to the other will not solve the complex issue of equitable access and integration.

We are of the opinion that an integrated approach involving all three ministries - the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Research and Innovation – will help Ontario and in the long-term, Canada, to move towards a free and equitable society for all.

We request clarification from you, explaining your decision to move the APT unit from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the policy implications of this move.

We welcome the opportunity to consult with you and the relevant ministries of the provincial government on issues of equitable access and integration, amongst other issues impacting the immigrant population of Ontario.

In good faith,

The Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT), Ontario.

⁶ Press Release, Premier's office <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/news/CabinetShuffle062905.asp>



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What is PROMPT?

- PROMPT is a policy roundtable that is made up of over twenty five diverse associations representing immigrant professionals, tradespeople, ethno-racial social planning councils, umbrella groups and community initiatives.
- PROMPT was founded in January 2003 and has achieved a considerable reputation as the collective voice of immigrant communities in Ontario.
- Our members include the Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (AIPSO), Chinese Professional Association of Canada (CPAC), Council for Access to the Profession of Engineering (CAPE), Hispanic Development Council (HDC), Canadian Society of Iranian Engineers and Architects (MOHANDDES), Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and **many more**.

What is PROMPT's goal?

- PROMPT's long-term goal is to improve the economic and social integration of immigrants to Canada by facilitating access to professions and trades, and to help create an equitable system of employment for all immigrants.

*PROMPT is a project of the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
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