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905-881-3373

Raid results in police complaint

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
jfantauzzi@yrmg.com

There would have been no need to use any force during the arrest of two men, who have filed a complaint against York Regional Police after a drug raid in 2008, if they had done what they were told to by officers, Chief Armand La Barge said.

The two men have been found guilty of obstructing police in connection with the raid, which took place Sept. 5 and 6, 2008 at the Sheraton Hotel in Richmond Hill.

Police were investigating reports of drug trafficking inside one of the hotel rooms, the chief said in an interview.

Armed with a warrant, police stopped one person with drugs, searched the hotel room and found 47 individually wrapped plastic baggies, containing about 100 grams of cocaine, worth about \$10,000, Chief La Barge said.

More than \$2,000 in cash was also found.

Tactical officers and four undercover detectives were involved in the raid, that resulted with four people being arrested, Chief La Barge said.

Two of those people were arrested without much difficulty, he said.

Two others did not comply with officer demands

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STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

TOUCHING MOMENT

Children excitedly pressed close to touch the shell of this box turtle on display during last weekend's Mill Pond Splash. The annual event, presented by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority involves hands-on activities for the whole family to teach water conservation and pollution prevention. For more photographs of the fun, see page 10.

New bullying law passed, despite mounting criticism

BY KIM ZARZOUR
kzarzour@yrmg.com

New legislation passed this week at Queen's Park dealing with how schools handle bullying incidents won't do much to stop student-on-student violence, say parents, politicians and teacher groups.

A growing coalition of parents from across the province view the new law, called Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act, as a battle lost, but a war just begun.

Passed Monday, Bill 157 comes into effect on February 1, 2010. It requires school staff to

report serious student incidents to the principal and requires principals to contact the parents of victims. It also requires school staff to respond to inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour among students.

The McGuinty government is calling it an "unprecedented" document, the first of its kind in Canada designed to address gaps in the reporting process.

But a statement released Tuesday by several parent groups, including the London Anti-bullying Coalition and a fledgling York Region branch of that coalition, says the act

offers nothing new and fails to address a lack of accountability in schools.

The parents, NDP education critic Rosario Marchese and Tory MPPs Peter Shurman and Joyce Savoline had been pushing for tougher legislation, including a law requiring principals to report serious incidents to police, Children's Aid Societies or school board administrators.

But their calls for mandatory reporting, better documentation of incidents and safety plans for victims didn't get past the Liberal-dominated standing committee that

reviewed the bill.

Committee member and MPP Shurman called the bill a "Liberal PR stunt".

"This bill is a diversion like bait-and-switch or false hope," the Thornhill politician said last week.

Mr. Shurman recounted victim testimony made at the standing committee by "tearful mothers" and "damaged children".

"I watched tearful members of the Liberal government sit opposite to me while the

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ELVIS STOJKO PROMOTES NEW SPORT, PAGE 2 ... 905 RUNNING OUT OF NUMBERS, PAGE 19

AS HEARD IN THE HOUSE:

From last week's debate at Queen's Park:

"My brother disclosed to my mother over two years ago that he had suffered student-on-student sexual abuse ... It seemed like the people in charge were more interested in covering up the perpetrator's actions, because they did nothing to make it better... As the school year progressed and this child was allowed to continue harassing my brother with no consequences, my mom would tell us that we would be leaving the school. The sad part of this is that we did nothing wrong.

It was really hard to see my mother constantly crying... When my brother and I began attending our new school, the beginning was very hard for all of us, especially my brother. He had fears of making friends, going to the bathroom, communicating with his teachers and much more. He also always seemed like his mind was somewhere else; flashbacks of what had happened at his previous school.

I was constantly with my brother at recesses because he was afraid to interact with boys his own age. When I was not there, he would stand up against the wall alone. My brother is afraid to go into a room of our house without one of us. If certain people did their job, there would have been no cover-ups and lies made."
- Sister of bully victim

"This is a huge opportunity lost again, and shamefully — at the expense of our children in our Ontario education system who find themselves first victimized by a fellow student and then victimized by the very system that they and their families rely on for protection ... This bill is really an insult to teachers, because they have been reporting these incidents, they have been

doing their due diligence and the buck stops in the principal's office... Behaviour that is not addressed becomes accepted behaviour." - MPP Joyce Savoline, PC education critic.

"The most crucial thing is to establish a positive school climate. You do that by making sure that all staff intervene and respond when there are incidents. That's what's in the legislation." - MPP Liz Sandals.

"It didn't matter how much I spoke up as a mother of a victim of student-on-student sexual abuse, nothing changed... As time went on and I repeatedly addressed my concerns with regards to the perpetrator's actions, the responses that I received were 'Mm-hmm' and 'Let it go.' ...The sad reality is that the principal was well aware of what my son had endured and did nothing to create a safe environment for him and others." - Toronto mother.

"The safe schools action team has recommended that there be a provincial manual for student-on-student sexual assault, a manual that is consistent across the province and that directs principals, vice-principals, staff members — all staff members — on how to deal with this... This government is looking at healthy relationships and putting that right in the curriculum so that every student in the province of Ontario who goes through our publicly funded education system will understand the importance of healthy relationships, what is a proper reaction, what is an improper reaction... With the police and school board protocols, yes, we agree that there needs to be more training to help all of the adults involved, and that will happen."
- Liberal MPP Leeanna Pendergast.

Parents vow to fight bully bill

From page 1.

mother of an eight-year-old talked about how her son was held down and restrained by other young children while another child performed oral sex on her eight-year-old son. If that doesn't raise your hackles, what does? The mother was there [telling her story at Queen's Park] because she never got news [of her son's assault] until she pried it out of her son."

Such trauma could be prevented, Mr. Shurman said, if principals were required to report incidents of abuse. Instead, other school staff are required to report under the act, but principals can use their discretion.

NO ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

"What makes principals so important? No school principal should have the absolute authority when it comes to the safety of Ontario's students."

Under the new legislation, principals can decide not to tell a victim's parents if they believe the victim would be at further risk. They are expected to follow board protocol to determine whether or not to inform police.

Liz Sandals, the education minister's parliamentary assistant, said many of the changes requested by parents and politicians are being considered by the ministry, but should be incorporated into policy and regulations, rather than provincial law.

That makes the bill an "empty gesture," Mr. Shurman said.

York-Simcoe MPP Julia Munro shared the disappointment. "Obviously we need to look at the best ways to help prevent these situations that are sometimes absolutely horrific and will stay with children for the rest of their lives.

"The bill was supposed to close the reporting gap, but it's just papering over it."

NDP critic Rosario Marchese said he too was moved to tears by the parents who spoke about their experiences.

"Based on the information that I heard, the principals dealt with them very, very poorly, if not badly."

While he supported the bill reluctantly, he criticized the Liberals for "simply putting in the form of law what we are already doing in practice." "What's left of this skimpy bill is that teachers now have to report to the principal.

It doesn't say what the schools should do once you report it. It doesn't talk about prevention, and it doesn't talk about what we do once we have the report about a problem in the school."

Meanwhile a growing number of families are adding their voice to press for changes. Parents from Brantford to Durham are joining with the London Anti-bullying Coalition to denounce the bill, and vowing to make bullying an election issue.

Karen Sebben, a Holland Landing mother who is organizing a York Region anti-bullying coalition, said the legislation offers parents false hope.

"When I think of all the wonderful accomplishments that could have been achieved with this legislation, the only thing that I come away with is, what a waste of taxpaying dollars."

Mrs. Sebben's son Daniel, 18, who was bullied for years and joined the coalition at the committee hearings last month, said he is disappointed his voice wasn't heard — but not disillusioned.

"I'm upset, but what can you do? We did our best and we'll just continue to do our best."

USING YOUTUBE AND FACEBOOK

The London and York Region coalitions are ramping up the fight, taking the message to YouTube and Facebook to spread the word that "the system is broken".

"Our politicians need to know that voter frustration with this system (which Bill 157 fails to address) is now at its peaking point," said Georgina resident Jason Koblovksy and supporter of the coalition.

While representatives of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation said it agrees with "the direction and spirit" of the bill, the union expressed concern with "the lack of any procedural clarity or training.

"The act does not give any clear sense of a hierarchy of responsibility, leaving education workers to wonder what takes precedence, their assigned duty or an incident outside of their classroom," the teachers said in a press release.

The act also fails to set out which staff will require what training to respond to youth violence, and who will provide that training, complain teacher.

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