



**ONTARIO
AUTISM
COALITION**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ontario Autism Coalition Calls On Ministry of Education to Issue Consistent Policy Allowing Autism Service Dogs In Ontario Schools

The [Ontario Autism Coalition](#), an organization at the forefront of the fight for the rights of autistic people and their families, is disappointed and frustrated by a recent Ontario Human Rights Tribunal decision that has denied the right of a young boy to have the support of his autism service dog at school.

“Like the family at the centre of this case, our community is saddened and confused by the outcome here,” said OAC Vice-President Laura Kirby-McIntosh. “But we also find ourselves questioning the process involved. How can this be considered a fair legal fight? On one side we have a school board that is able to spend hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars paying their lawyers, and on the other is a family that has to pay out of their own pocket. All this to fight about a nine-year old boy and a certified autism service dog. What if all that money had used to accommodate him and others like him?”

Kirby-McIntosh is a teacher and the mother of two children with autism, one of whom takes a service dog with him to school every day without issue. To her, this case highlights the inequity that can result when the Ministry of Education takes a hands-off approach with school boards. “It makes no sense to me that my son can walk through the doors of his school every day with *his* service dog, but another child in a different school board has been told that he can’t” she said.

In its Education Recommendations Report entitled “[New Horizons](#),” issued in April, 2017, the OAC presented over 60 ideas to Education Minister Mitzie Hunter on how to improve outcomes for autistic students. The report included an endorsement of the [AODA Alliance’s](#) call for an Education Accessibility Standard, which would ensure equal treatment for all students with disabilities in Ontario. But the response from the Ministry has been slow, and the group believes that the time for action on the issue of service dogs in schools is now.

The OAC is now calling on Minister Hunter to create a consistent policy permitting certified autism service dogs in schools and to direct all 72 school boards across Ontario to adopt a consistent approach to the issue. Members of the Coalition have already indicated their willingness to mobilize and protest to show their support for the family at the centre of the case.

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#AutismDoesntEndAtSchool

The Ontario Autism Coalition is a non-profit Ontario corporation dedicated to advocacy and political action on behalf of people with autism.

www.ontarioautismcoalition.com



From left to right: Cliff McIntosh, his service dog Basil, AODA Alliance Chair David Lepofsky, Kenner Fee, and his service dog Ivy. Cliff is allowed to take Basil to school every day, but a recent Human Rights Tribunal decision says that the Waterloo Catholic District School Board can deny Kenner the right to bring Ivy with him to school.

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