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Autism Community Hopeful New Minister Means Progress

The Ontario Autism Coalition (OAC) is looking forward to working with Merrilee Fullerton as the new Minister for Children, Community, and Social Services. Fullerton's appointment presents an opportunity for renewed dialogue and cooperation working toward a better Ontario Autism Program.

So far, the program has been plagued with delays and the creation of unnecessary bureaucracy. The Ford government has abandoned its commitment to cutting red tape by planning to employ hundreds of "care coordinators" for the program. These bureaucrats with one day of training are to replace clinicians with years of education when assessing the needs of autistic children and youth.

The OAC is hopeful that as a medical professional who appreciates the importance of prompt care, Fullerton will accelerate the roll-out of services. The current "pilot project" that is months behind schedule will serve less than 1.5% of kids on the waitlist. The former minister's promise of 8,000 kids in service by the end of this year would leave nearly 40,000 children on a waitlist that has doubled under the Ford government. These delays must not continue.

The OAC is hopeful that Minister Fullerton will take this opportunity to meet with the OAC and recommit to creating a more equitable system than what is currently in place. A new face with the same ideas will not be enough. We look forward to working with Minister Fullerton in making real change and real progress on a file that affects the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable children.

The autism community has fought relentlessly to ensure children and youth with autism have access to therapy services that meet their needs. Minister Fullerton will be taking over the MCCSS file with a fresh set of eyes, and she has an opportunity for a fresh start that could keep the promises that Doug Ford made during the last election campaign before the next one is upon us.

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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