

For Immediate Release

Thursday, November 16, 2006 (Belleville, Ontario)

"Standing room only crowd for presentation by Deaf Lawyer Jennifer Jackson"

More than eighty local people, many of them Deaf turned out to hear a dynamic presentation by Jennifer Jackson who is a lawyer and also Executive Director of the Ontario Association of the Deaf (OAD) on Wednesday, November 15 at the Belleville Public Library. The packed room listed intently as she spoke passionately about the human rights of the Deaf, and issues of discrimination faced by members of the Deaf Community. She also provided information about the pilot Deaf legal clinic the OAD has sponsored, and her dream for a Deaf legal clinic.

Communicating through American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, members of the local Deaf community raised many issues of concern. Hearing audience members learned that the recent municipal election and all candidates meetings were not accessible to people who are Deaf. A petition to the elections Returning Officer was circulated and many people signed it. A complaint to Elections Ontario and the Human Rights Commission are also being considered. A second issue raised was that government funding is not available for modern communication devices like video phones and Personal Digital Assistants that have all but replaced the antiquated TTY telephone equipment for the Deaf.

Members of the Deaf community also spoke about the need for more ASL interpreters locally. Parents of Deaf children spoke about the need for more ASL training for children and family members so that they can communicate with each other. Ms. Jackson spoke of the OAD-sponsored legal challenge to a recent government policy that denies some Deaf children and parents access to ASL training.

Ms. Jackson also congratulated the Belleville Association of the Deaf for their recent award at the OAD's 120 anniversary celebration last month.

Ms. Jackson is a former student of Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf, is one of only four deaf lawyers in Canada. She also participated in high school assembly at Sir James Whitney where a large crowd of high school students stayed after school and only reluctantly let her leave for her next engagement. She also met with members of the Deaf Accessibility Project to provide advice on how local agencies can provide more appropriate and accessible services for Deaf victims of domestic violence.

Her visit was sponsored by the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre. The local clinic has been helping people living on a low income since 1980 with their legal problems in the areas of housing law (tenants' rights), income assistance, criminal injuries compensation, employment law including worker's compensation, and human rights. Staff have a special interest in offering accessible services to members of our local Deaf community.

For further information about the contents of the press release, please call Michele Leering or Deirdre McDade at the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre at 613-966-8686, ext. 27 or ext. 26, respectively, or toll free at 1-877-966-8686. Email contact at leeringm@lao.on.ca is also available.

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