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NDP MPP Sattler introduces bill to help parents of adult children with disabilities

Queen's Park – On Wednesday, NDP MPP Peggy Sattler (London West) introduced the *Family Law Amendment Act (Support for Adult Children), 2017* in the legislature.

Currently, parents of adult children with disabilities are only able to obtain child support orders if they had been married, or if their children are attending post-secondary education. This bill allows all parents to apply for support, regardless of marital status.

"The federal *Divorce Act* has provisions for the support of adult children with disabilities, but there is no such provision in Ontario's *Family Law Act*," Sattler said. "This effectively discriminates against unmarried parents – and it is their adult children with disabilities who are hurt as a result."

Jennifer Howard, a partner at the law firm Devry Smith Frank LLP, has launched a charter challenge to address this concern in the courts. "This necessary change to the *Family Law Act* provides much needed support to unmarried families who are caring for adult children with disabilities, and often lack the financial resources necessary to go through an expensive and lengthy litigation process."

John Schuman, another lawyer supporting the charter challenge, shared his hopes that changes will come from the legislature rather than the courts. "As more people with disability are living longer, and fewer parents are marrying, we are seeing exponential growth in cases like this," said Schuman. "Parliamentary debate can produce better law than an order a judge makes after only hearing from the parties to a case."

Sattler first became aware of the legal loophole after the matter was brought to her by Marnie Carson, a parent from Sattler's community of London West. Marnie's son Brayden has a disability, but because she was never married to Brayden's biological father, his formal support is set to end when he finishes school.

"People with disabilities have very insecure futures, with high unemployment and limited incomes," said Carson. "We, as parents and Ontarians, should be doing all we can to improve financial security for adults with disabilities."

"I urge the premier to stop wasting the court's time and do the right thing," said Sattler. "She should make this bill law now, instead of forcing the families who are in need to carry the burden of pushing this challenge through."

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