

Attention News Editors:

McGuinty smoking ban will result in severe financial harm to Charity Bingo in Ontario

Funding at risk for 4000 charities and 3.5 million Ontarians

TORONTO, April 28 /CNW/ - Today, the worst fears of Ontario's charity bingo and the charity and community organizations they fund were outlined as The Committee to Save Charity Bingo (CSCB) appeared at Queen's Park to request that the McGuinty government rethink its proposed full smoking ban in charity bingos across the province.

"Charity bingos operate in so many communities across Ontario," said

Leonard Parente, charity bingo owner and member of the CSCB. "They raise millions of dollars for people in need. Eliminating our designated smoking rooms will be financially devastating for charity bingo and its 4000 charities. No smoking means no bingo which results in no charity dollars. It's that simple."

The McGuinty government's total smoking ban will have a severe negative effect on the 100 charity bingo halls operating in communities across the province. Presently, charity bingo serves and is operated by some 4,000 Ontario charities and involves the work of approximately 100,000 volunteers and bingo workers. The funds raised through bingo provide community services and local programs to over 3.5 million Ontarians every day.

Today, the reality of charity bingo is that 70% of the customers are smokers who want the option of smoking while they play bingo. All major municipalities across Ontario have presently instituted no-smoking by-laws that for the most part recognize the uniqueness and necessity of protecting charity bingo. Bingos are allowed to operate with separate, ventilated smoking rooms that are regulated and inspected by municipal law enforcement officers. The McGuinty ban will outlaw separate, ventilated rooms for good.

Without charity bingos, money will dry up to help fund charities and programs that assist millions of disadvantaged, disabled, handicapped and elderly people across the province. Organizations such as the CNIB, March of Dimes, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Diabetes Association, Lung Association, Rotary, Kinsmen, Knights of Columbus and hundreds of churches and local food banks will see their much needed funding cut significantly.

"We need charity bingo funds to continue to provide vital budget planning and debt repayment services to approximately 300 low-income residents and their families in Toronto each year," said Karen Bass, Executive Director of Coping in Tough Times (CITT). "Over the years, funding has been withdrawn from the City, Province and United Way for a variety of reasons and we have come to be dependent upon revenues from bingo sessions to continue these important programs in our community. Without this source of funding, the agency would have no alternative but to cease operations in our community."

In addition, some 46% of bingo funded charities includes youth and minor sport associations that fund programs that directly benefit 1.2 million children. Well known names such as Big Brothers, Boys and Girls Clubs, Kiwanis and Variety raise funds everyday from charity bingo to support their youth programs.

"Bingo funding for charity and community organizations is the glue that helps hold this province together." said Parente. "It is the missing link that

helps fill the widening public service gap by picking up where limited government services stop. If Mr. McGuinty does away with separate ventilated smoking rooms, charity bingo is doomed and that funding gap will widen even more.”

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