



Canada Court Watch

A program of the National Association for Public & Private Accountability
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The Honourable Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Children & Youth Services
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Dear Minister

RE: Abuse of illegal drugs by CAS workers

Recently, a professional health care worker who attended the Hamilton CAS "Grape Expectations" fund raising event in Hamilton on October 30, 2006, contacted Canada Court Watch and reported seeing several workers with the Children's Aid Society engage in smoking hash near the front entrance to this public event.

The high profile "Grape Expectations" fund raising event was held at the Luna Station Banquet Hall on James St. N. in Hamilton with tickets being sold at \$100 each.

According to this professional who contacted our offices, the actions of the CAS workers were visible to members of the public entering the main entrance to the event. The odour of drugs was also noticeable in the area surrounding the area where the CAS workers were smoking the illegal substances. It was reported that one well-dressed, elderly gentleman who was dropped off at the entrance to the event by a private limousine was also not pleased to see the CAS workers indulging in drugs near the entrance to the building. The unnamed gentleman walked over to the CAS workers and told them that they should be ashamed for what they were doing and that they should at least be going to the back of the building to make their activities a bit less obvious.

The CAS workers laughed and just ignored the well intentioned gentleman who obviously could see that the CAS workers were stoned and exercising very poor judgement.

This incident of illegal drug use by CAS workers in Hamilton falls on the heels of the arrest and conviction of another CAS worker, Sarah Villella, who was recently convicted in court of helping to bring illegal guns into Canada. Ms. Villella is also facing charges relating to the import and sale of illegal drugs in Canada. The CAS workers indulging in drugs at the Grape Expectations event knew Sarah Villella and had worked with her at the CAS before her arrest and conviction.

The fact that CAS workers have become bold enough as to openly indulge in drug use at a public event clearly indicates that a serious problem exists. Most law abiding citizens of Ontario would agree that

illegal drug use should have no place at any CAS agency or at any function sponsored by the CAS. Allowing CAS workers to indulge in drugs sets a double standard as many parents involved with CAS are subjected to drug testing by CAS agencies as a condition of having access to their children. Many parents are being forced to subject themselves to drug tests by CAS workers who may in fact be doing drugs themselves. It would seem that the CAS workers have established one set of standards for parents in the community and no standards of accountability for themselves.

While the Ministry has just promised to deal with the issue of blatant abuse of taxpayer's monies by some CAS workers, it is time that the issue of drug use of drugs by CAS workers be dealt with as well. Even if it is only some CAS workers are involved with drugs, those involved must be removed from their duties so that their influences will not rub off to the other workers or on to some of the children and families they serve.

Court Watch has received calls from some teenage children who have reported that CAS workers have provided kids in care with booze, cigarettes and sometimes even drugs. When a culture of drugs and involvement with the criminal sector infiltrate a CAS agency and become accepted as normal amongst workers and volunteers, a lot of damage can be done to the very children who CAS are supposed to be caring for.

It is well known that organized crime is responsible for importing most illegal drugs and when CAS workers become involved with those associated with organized crime, they put the agency they work for at risk. The case involving former Hamilton CAS worker Sarah Villella is a clear example of how her connections with organized crime led up to her arrest and conviction of gun running. The chances are that she was involved with drugs and organized crime while she was an employee of the Hamilton CAS.

This latest incident of CAS workers taking drugs at the Grape Expectations event can only lead many to question if other workers are connected to the same circle of friends as was Sarah Villella. This begs the question: Could some CAS workers be "bought off" with free drugs? Could some CAS workers turn a blind eye to suspected abuse of children in families connected with drugs? Could a CAS worker become dependent on drugs to the point where he/she could be blackmailed to obtain confidential records from CAS files?

In another troubling case involving the York Region CAS, a supervisor with the agency, Ms. Donna Lennon, recently pleaded guilty in the Newmarket Court to stealing money from children in care. According to the mother of the child involved, she believed that Ms. Lennon may have become involved with drugs and that money problems as a result of drug use may have caused the CAS supervisor to steal from children in care. If it had not been for Court Watch assisting the mother to pursue the crime, the CAS supervisor would likely still be working for the CAS and still likely stealing from other children in care.

To protect our province's most vulnerable and to help ensure that CAS workers are not involved with the criminal element, all case workers with the Hamilton CAS who are directly involved with families should be promptly screened for drugs use, using a hair test. If workers at the Hamilton CAS have not taken drugs, they should offer no objection to a hair test being conducted on themselves. If anything, CAS workers should be eager to demonstrate that they are willing to comply to the same set of standards that they impose on many parents in the community when use of drugs has been alleged. Those workers who refuse or object to drug testing likely have something to hide.

CAS employees found with illegal drugs in their system should be immediately relieved from their duties without pay and not allowed to return to work until drug tests confirm that they are free of drugs.

When it comes to the use of illegal drugs by CAS workers, there should be a zero tolerance policy established. It is imperative that workers involved with illegal drugs at the CAS be weeded out and their links to organized crime broken. The only way to find out this for sure is to have drug testing done on all workers by an independent lab and monitored by the RCMP or the local police. Random drug testing should be a condition of employment with all CAS agencies, with testing being monitored by an independent outside agency under the control of a police force.

It is inevitable that if random drug testing is not implemented for CAS workers that it will be only a matter of time until other CAS workers are caught up again in the web of illegal drugs. Random drug testing for CAS workers as a condition for all future employment would certainly be a reasonable step for the Ontario Government to take to help protect the integrity of this province's child protection system.

A personal meeting could be arranged if you would like to speak to the person who attended the Grape Expectations event and witnessed the abuse of drugs by CAS workers. If you wish to meet, then please contact me through the number on this letterhead.

Your response would be appreciated.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dorian A. Baxter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

The Archbishop Dorian A. Baxter, B.A., O.T.C., M. Div
National Chairman

cc: Members of the Ontario Legislature
Members of the House of Commons
Ombudsman of Ontario
Hamilton Police