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The Honourable Laurel C. Broten
Minister of the Environment
12th Floor, 135 St. Clair Avenue West
Toronto, Ontario M4V 1P5

February 19, 2007

Dear Minister Broten,

Re: OPHA's support for a Call to Action on Climate Change and Clean Air

On behalf of the Environmental Health Workgroup of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), I am writing to extend our support for actions that your government is taking to address climate change and improve air quality. Founded in 1949, the OPHA is a volunteer, non-profit organization established to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. The Environmental Health Workgroup is composed of people who are actively involved in research, policy analysis and/or health promotion related to environmental health issues, including air quality, water quality, pesticides, climate change and children's environmental health.

Your Ministry's initiative to integrate climate change and clean air discussions and strategies is timely, as evidence clearly demonstrates that these issues are interconnected and strategies to address climate change and clean air are co-beneficial. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and related air contaminants associated with respiratory and cardiovascular disease and premature death is critical to improve the environment and the health of the public.

While the acute effects of smog are already well known, a growing body of research on the chronic and cumulative impacts of poor outdoor air quality indicate that this is also an area of serious concern. Evidence points to air pollution playing an important role in chronic diseases such as lung cancer and asthma. Infants, children, the elderly and people with pre-existing health conditions such as asthma, heart disease and lung disease are more susceptible to the adverse effects of poor air quality. Research has also indicated that children's exposure to air pollution can result in decreased lung function as an adult.

In 2004, OPHA's membership adopted a position paper and resolution on Climate Change and Human Health (*attached and available online at http://www.opha.on.ca/ppres/2004-03_pp.pdf*) that addresses the many implications of climate change to the health of the public. These include:

- Negative health impacts and potential fatalities due to extremes in hot and cold temperatures;
- Increasing warm temperatures causing more frequent poor air quality events and associated adverse health effects;
- Negative impacts on drinking and recreational water caused by run-off from heavy rainfall;
- Higher water temperatures causing increased algal blooms and higher levels of toxins in fish;
- Health effects and illness related to infectious diseases, existing and emerging, transmitted by insects and other vectors.

Public Health units throughout the GTA and in other areas of the province are working in partnership with other agencies and professional groups to address climate change. Initiatives such as **20/20 The Way to Clean Air** (a social marketing program to reduce automobile and energy use), **Safe and Active Routes to Schools** programs, and programs that encourage alternate transportation, employee trip reduction and car-pooling programs are some examples of these types of initiatives.

The OPHA suggests that the following key components should be included in a climate change and clean air plan:

- Firm dates for the closure of Ontario's coal-fired power plants;
- Greater financial support for the development and expansion of public transportation systems particularly between communities across the Greater GTA;
- Development of enforceable guidelines to support the development and implementation of "complete communities" that can be effectively serviced with public transit, cycling and walking;
- Incorporation of air quality and climate change mitigation into the mandatory programs for Public Health units;
- Firm caps for Greenhouse Gases with set target dates; and
- "Green funds" for the municipal sector to encourage corporate and community projects that have the potential to significantly reduce emissions that contribute to air pollution and/or climate change.

We applaud the Ministry of the Environment's initiative to seek input from many stakeholders on the issue of climate change and clean air. The OPHA's Environmental Health Workgroup members participated at the health and environment, transportation and industrial sectoral roundtable discussions on climate change. The roundtables were well facilitated and provided an excellent opportunity for OPHA to profile the many public health issues related to climate change and clean air.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in future consultations related to climate change and clean air and we strongly encourage your Ministry to maintain its commitment to expediting the creation of a climate change and clean air action plan.

Yours truly,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President