

OCSTA has recently made two submissions to the Minister of Community and Social Services in regard to the proposed Standards on Accessible Information and Communications.

OCSTA made the following online submission that outlined in particular our concerns regarding Section 7 of the proposed Standard, which deals with Accessible Municipal and Provincial Elections, and has implications for trustee candidates.

**ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION
ON-LINE SUBMISSION TO
THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES ACCESSIBILITY DIRECTORATE OF
ONTARIO**

FEBRUARY 4, 2009

Section 7 – Accessible Municipal and Provincial Elections

OCSTA's membership consists of 29 English Catholic District School Boards and 5 English Catholic school authorities that collectively educate approximately 600,000 students.

Catholic school boards support the right of all persons of all ages with disabilities to enjoy equal opportunity to participate fully in the life of Ontario. Our school boards' commitment to those with special needs is demonstrated daily in the significant levels of financial and human resources dedicated to providing programs and services for exceptional students and accommodation for employees and other members of our educational community.

It is critical that school boards' needs and interests be considered as accessibility standards are developed and implemented. The current education funding formula does not provide dollars for implementing new accessibility standards. Additional resources will be required for the planning and implementation of accessibility standards. It is therefore essential that the necessary funding flow to school boards at the same time as standards are put in place.

We are generally supportive of the thrust of the Proposed Accessibility Standard for Information and Communications. OCSTA has particular concerns, however, about Sec. 7.2 which requires candidates in municipal elections, including candidates for the office of school trustee, to provide their election and candidate material in a manner consistent with Sec. 5 and Schedule 1.

As we understand it, if this standard were implemented, candidates for election as a trustee would have to be prepared to provide, if requested by a voter with a disability printed election material in an accessible electronic format, in Braille, in accessible audio format, in large print, and in an electronic format with supports for comprehension.

Any web pages, web sites, spoken or audio recordings, video recordings or electronic text files used by trustee candidates as campaign material in an accessible format.

Although OCSTA supports efforts to improve accessibility of persons with disabilities with respect to civic participation, we must point out that these requirements could present serious financial and logistical implications for anyone seeking the office of trustee.

1. The cost to candidates to provide the above services is unknown and could be substantial. Potential candidates of limited means would thus be disadvantaged.
2. The Municipal Elections Act places limits on the amount candidates can spend. The cost of providing accessible election materials will have to be factored into a candidate's overall election budget and will impact the amount available for other purposes. Because expenditures will need to be incurred on request only, and perhaps late in the campaign period, it will be difficult for candidates to ensure they comply with expenditure limits. These new costs may need to be exempted from current spending limits through a legislative amendment.
3. Trustee candidates across Ontario particularly those in small centres, may not have equal access to services that could provide Braille translation, technological expertise, etc.
4. If Sec. 7.2 is implemented, hundreds of municipal and school board candidates would potential all be seeking these services during the same relatively brief election period. This process could be quite inefficient. Vendors may take advantage of the high demand and raise prices. Provision to candidates by the Ministry of Community and Social Services of an approved vendors list could provide some assistance.

We recommend the establishment of an appropriately funded resource within the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing that will provide candidates running for municipal office full support in offering election/candidate materials and services and running candidates' meetings in formats that are fully accessible to persons with disabilities.