

# Comment

## Enough is enough

Many Milton property taxpayers are probably not aware they're paying about \$170 a year to help fund Toronto's social assistance and social housing.

The total cost to Halton property taxpayers last year was \$35.1 million and next year's bill is projected at \$37 million across the region.

It's all part of the GTA pooling system — another legacy of the Ontario Harris PC government — which sees outlying GTA communities such as Milton contribute funds to offset Toronto's social service costs.

In theory, the GTA pooling program was based upon the argument that many of the GTA's poor and disadvantaged gravitate toward the larger urban centres like Toronto where the social services are more readily available. The argument is also made that many of the inhabitants of the GTA communities work in Toronto and enjoy many of the services provided by Toronto taxpayers.

Practically speaking, however, social service costs have no business being part of the property tax bill for any community.

This is clearly a provincial responsibility and one that can be better handled by the provincial tax system, which has more flexibility for raising funds that a municipal property tax collection system.

If Ontario is hit by another recession, Halton and the outlying GTA communities will be strapped to pay for their own social service costs — let alone those of Toronto.

Finally some GTA communities are saying "enough is enough" and a movement is afoot to cap their GTA pooling costs.

At a recent regional council session, Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette introduced a motion that would cap Halton's 2005 pooling payments at a three per cent increase over the \$35.1 million it paid last year.

We urge regional council to approve that motion and put the Ontario Government on notice that this system is broken and needs major fixing.

Capping the GTA pooling amounts is just a start. The provincial government needs to come up with a better method of paying for its social service costs than burdening the already overburdened property taxpayers.



## Our Readers Write

Do you want to have your say on a local issue? If so, send in a letter to the editor.

### Public school Board chair challenges facts in editorial regarding legal fees

Dear Editor:

The Champion ran an editorial November 18 entitled 'Public deserves better' that stated, "Hiring an outside law firm when the board already had a lawyer on retainer was a waste of tax dollars."

That statement is untrue. The Halton District School Board (HDSB) during my tenure — since December of 2003 — hasn't had a lawyer or a firm of lawyers on retainer.

The editorial went on to quote that Vice-Chair Peggy Russell and I said the legal advice would cost the board \$10,000. The article further stated that this \$10,000 turned into a \$54,299.16 bill. What happened is we answered a question in the middle of May and the \$10,000 was

accurate. The firm then went on to do a great deal more work for the board into August. Some of the work billed beyond the first \$10,000 was writing a new contract for the (incoming) director of education. The contract was developed in consultation with all trustees.

The lawyers and I also worked along with Education Minister Gerard Kennedy because he and I wanted to assure the people of Halton and Ontario that we would never, ever have to pay out \$600,000 again in a settlement.

This huge settlement was paid out because the preceding board never bothered to get legal advice on the former director's contract.

The editorial also inaccurately stated that if the information hadn't

been leaked by the Metroland papers, the public would never have known. Perhaps the editors missed the HDSB's public document, report 05077 (released October 28), that details those expenditures. It should be pointed out that for the first time ever, the chair of the board (Paul Tate), requested that all the legal expenses back to 2002 be made public.

Lastly, there was a letter to the editor recently from Joe Henry. Mr. Henry takes issue with a quote attributed to me, and then used out of context, that stated, "I don't need to be held to a standard that wasn't followed by anyone else." Former chairs Mary Chapin and Ethel Gardiner, during their tenures, didn't publish legal fees, and made sweeping changes to governance policy without public consultation. Yes, I stand by the statement. I won't be held to their standard, because it was so low.

Yes, I agree with the editorial headline 'Public deserves better', and that's precisely what this board

is doing — improving education in Halton. I think the headline might be better applied to the reporting in the Metroland newspapers around education, where the public deserves better.

**Paul Tate, chair  
Halton District School Board  
Editor's note:**

- Contrary to Mr. Tate's statement, lawyer Robert Keel recently told *The Champion's* sister publication, *The Burlington Post*, that he's currently on retainer with the HDSB.

- Confidential documents obtained by *The Post* clearly indicate that Miller Thomson — the firm hired by Mr. Tate and vice-chair Peggy Russell — submitted invoices exceeding \$35,000 for consultations made prior to two special board meetings held in May. The \$10,000 in legal costs promised by Mr. Tate after those board meetings continued to grow to \$54,299 as the law firm was consulted on a variety of other board issues including the contract for

incoming director of education Wayne Joudrie.

- We find it refreshing that Mr. Tate has finally admitted that former education director Dusty Papke's settlement package exceeded \$600,000. In June, the board chair vehemently denied the figure, stating, "I don't think what you just told me is remotely true. I think the sources that you're getting it from are absolutely mistaken. I can't react to what's fantasy."

- Mr. Tate's suggestion that the preceding board never sought legal advice on the former director's contract simply isn't true. Ethel Gardiner — a rookie trustee in 1997 when Mr. Papke was hired by the board — recalls a lawyer being consulted for legal advice pertaining to Mr. Papke's contract. Past board chair Linda Glover confirmed that law firm McCarthy Tetrault reviewed Mr. Papke's contract before it was officially voted on by the board of trustees in 1997.

The Champion stands by its editorial on the HDSB's legal costs.

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## Pud

by Steve Nease

