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**Police board chair puts her best face on change**

By **KAREN SMITH**  
*The Champion*

The Tory government's recently announced policing changes won't have a big impact in Halton, says the head of the local police services boards.

Wendy Roberts, chair of the Halton Police Service Board, said she's wary of the proposed amendments to the Police Services Act, but doesn't expect significant problems.

However, while a new Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services will be created to see that a certain level of policing is maintained, Ms Roberts said having local people call the shots means political interference is only an arm's length away.

Ms Roberts said her biggest concern is a change giving municipalities the authority to set budgets with the idea of ensuring greater accountability, and control over police services at the local level.

"I believe that the (police) department should set the budget," she said. "I'm not sure this is going to make a good impact on us."

She also said she's worried that the new system might place more emphasis on saving money than community safety.

Still, "We have a good relationship with the region, and I think it will stay," she said. "I don't anticipate a big impact."

Regions and other local governments will take over responsibility for police services boards — now considered indepen-

dent bodies with a majority of provincial appointees — under changes announced last Tuesday by Solicitor General Bob Runciman.

The proposed legislation will require all municipalities to pay for their own policing starting in 1998.

The changes don't bother Oakville regional Councillor Keith Bird, who's heading into his third year on the Halton Police Services Board.

He said board members being appointed by the region instead of the province will have no effect on the calibre of people chosen. "It doesn't strike me that they just flip through the telephone book."

Mr. Runciman maintained the amendments will cut red tape, foster community involvement and allow more local control over police service delivery.

"Local governments should make decisions about local services, while the provincial government must ensure province-wide standards of policing and community safety," he said.

Another amendment will create a new streamlined police complaints system, which Mr. Runciman said will simplify the process.

"The system will be more accountable with a 30-day initial response time set for public complaints."

The province's Special Investigations Unit, which looks into serious incidents involving police, will remain under the Ministry of the Attorney General.

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