

Organ donation bill gains support

A private members bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees requiring Ontario residents to declare whether they want to donate their organs after death has received unanimous support in the Legislature.

The bill received all-party support at Queen's Park Thursday and would entail everyone 16 and older to make a declaration concerning organ donation when they apply for or renew a driver's license or health card.

"The purpose of this bill is to emphasize the increasing importance

of organ donation to saving lives and reducing the suffering and uncertainty of patients who are now locked in to long waiting lists," Mr. Klees said.

Nearly 2,000 people are waiting for kidney, heart, liver or lung transplants, while many die each year waiting for organs.

Rather than presuming a deceased person would consent to donating organs, the bill gives Ontario residents the choice to either donate, opt out or declare themselves undecided.

A 2001 Environics poll reported 96

per cent of Canadians support organ donation, fewer than 45 per cent indicated they signed donor cards.

"The proposed mandatory declaration respects the right of every individual to make this very personal decision, but also ensures that everyone gives serious consideration to the opportunity they have to save a life," Mr. Klees said.

The bill has been referred to the standing committee on social policy.

—Michael Power

'They looked like a normal family'

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townhouse near Mulock Drive and Yonge Street in Newmarket.

Mr. Mustafa, who, officials say, has used the alias Murtaza, is being investigated for involvement with a Pakistani extremist organization closely linked to the now infamous al-Qaida — the same group responsible for Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.

Mr. Aly, officials say, has been living illegally in Canada after fleeing the U.S. where he is wanted by authorities.

Both men had been working as taxi drivers for Today's Taxi in Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville for about a year.

"If that's what terrorists look like, everybody should be aware. These are my neighbours. It's scary," said Carole, who did not want her last name used.

The two men were living at the home with a woman and three children, under six, Carole said, adding she believed the family was the wife and children of either Mr. Mustafa or Mr. Aly.

"They looked a normal family. My concern is for the children," she said, adding both men only knew her well enough to say, "Hi boss" on occasion.

She had no idea one of the men was a suspected terrorist until the story appeared in various media Thursday.

Today's Taxi general manager Maher Al Fawagreh said both men met all the requirements to work as cab drivers,

which includes a police criminal record check and all the criteria required by the Town of Newmarket who license taxis.

"I was shocked like anybody else," Mr. Al Fawagreh said in an interview.

"I didn't know anything about these guys," he said, adding the men only came into the office two or three times in the time they had been working for the taxi company.

Drivers lease their vehicles independently and often keep them at home, Mr. Al Fawagreh said.

Other taxi drivers were learning of the arrests for the first time Friday.

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One driver for Today's Taxi, who did not want his name used, saying he feared for his safety and of being fired for speaking to the media, said he steered clear of Mr. Mustafa and Mr. Aly.

His gut instinct, he said, was to avoid the men, who often worked 18 hours rather than the typical 12 to 14-hour shift.

Abe Hussein has been driving a cab for the company for a few years and questioned how the men were able to overcome regulations so easily.

"How the hell does this happen?" he

said while waiting for commuters at Newmarket's GO bus terminal.

But Newmarket town clerk Anita Moore said the municipality did its due diligence and wouldn't speculate if tighter restrictions are needed for taxi licensing.

"We followed our process," she said.

The criteria for a taxi licence in Newmarket, which varies from town to town requires drivers to provide:

- Application form;
- Driver's abstract from the Ministry of Transportation;
- Canadian citizenship documents;
- Valid driver's license
- Written test to ensure the applicant is familiar with the town's bylaw and;
- Police background check.

Every taxi driver in town must re-register every year in May, said licensing officer Florence Di Passio, adding last month's incident was the first time she knows of where a taxi driver had lied to conceal his identity.

York Regional Police Const. Laurie Perks said if a \$40 background check is required by an employer, it only shows if a person has a criminal record.

"When you run a name and nothing comes up, then nothing comes up," she said.

"The police aren't responsible. We don't check on immigration."

Mr. Mustafa and Mr. Aly are believed to be held in a Toronto jail since their arrest.

— with files from Martin Derbyshire



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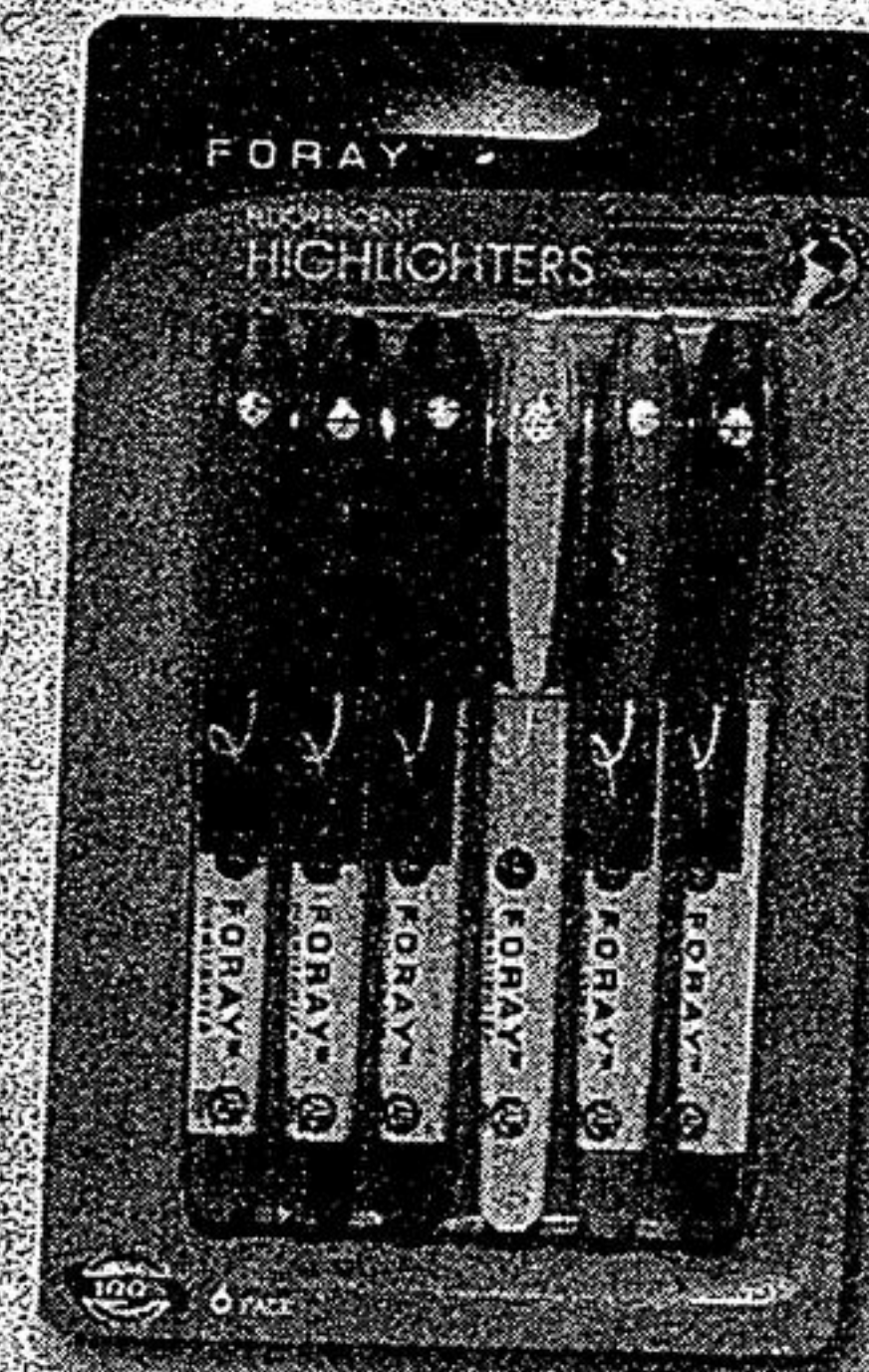
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