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Report outlines measures to help disabled overcome obstacles

Last summer, in preparation for the International Year of Disabled People, the federal government set up a Parliamentary Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped to evaluate the scope and effectiveness of existing government programs for the disabled and to suggest measures for their improvement. The committee's report, entitled Obstacles, was tabled in the House of Commons last month.

The following are some of the recommendations made by the committee for legislative, fiscal and organizational initiatives on the part of the government:

- That physical handicap be made a proscribed ground of discrimination for all discriminatory practices listed in the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA), and not just for discriminatory employment practices.

That the CHRA be further amended so that tribunal orders can be made with respect to access to goods, services, facilities and accommodation, and that it include a qualification that the changes ordered by a tribunal should not impose undue hardship on the respondent.

That mental handicaps (learning disabilities, retardation or mental illness) and a previous history of mental illness or a previous history of dependence on alcohol or other drugs be added to the proscribed grounds of discrimination under the CHRA.

Canadians are no longer prepared to accept this form of discrimination in any area of society. By far the most repeated request that the committee received in its hearings across Canada was for greater protection under the CHRA. In addition, these requests were supported by representations that have been made during the past two years to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, by samplings of public opinion, and by recent legislative developments in several provinces. They all clearly point to the need for improvement under the CHRA.

Those Canadians who are mentally ill, or who have learning disabilities, are in special need of protection because their problems tend to be invisible. As a result, there is a general lack of public understanding about the needs, abilities and problems of these individuals. The mentally ill are occasionally considered to be dangerous lunatics. Both groups experience discrimination in a variety of everyday situations — particularly when seeking employment. Legal protection, therefore, is needed to safeguard the rights of these individuals who have special needs.

Education a right

- That the federal government encourage all provinces to include in their human rights legislation the right to an education that ensures disabled children the opportunity to reach and exercise their full potential.

Throughout its hearings, the committee received evidence that disabled children, especially those with learning disabilities, do not have equal opportunity to educa-



Ramps for building accessibility.

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Eleven years ago this week...

Canada and 18 other countries signed an agreement to create a Francophone International Co-operation Society, an agency for cultural and technological co-operation among French-speaking nations; the Canadian provinces of Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba signed the founding charter.

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