



B.C. Human Rights Coalition

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Media Release

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11th Hour Amendments to Human Rights Code Disappoint

(VANCOUVER, Canada) - The BC Human Rights Coalition is extremely disappointed that the government rushed through very serious changes to human rights legislation yesterday.

The amendments to the *Human Rights Code* that passed yesterday will take effect January 1, 2008. They will effectively abolish mandatory retirement for those who wish to continue to work past age 65 and they will extend protection against age based discrimination in accommodations and services that are customarily available to the public.

“While we, like most British Columbians, welcome these changes we believe there may be negative implications that could have been resolved through substantial debate and consultation had the government allowed that process to occur,” says Susan O’Donnell, Executive Director of the BC Human Rights Coalition. For example, legislation such as the *Workers Compensation Act* is geared to assist injured workers only up to the age of 65. Without amending this legislation to include those older than 65, it is not clear that an older injured worker would have access to equal benefits. “To the best of our knowledge, the government did not assess any legislation governing the workplace before making these changes to the *Human Rights Code*,” said O’Donnell.

The amendments also lack a well thought out balance between workers entitlement to group insurance benefits versus insurance industry needs to properly assess risk based on age. Even more surprising given that changes were targeted to seniors, is the lack of a legislative provision that preserves preferential benefits afforded to seniors in service areas such as in the case of discounted seniors shopping days.

Many of these issues have been dealt with in other jurisdictions and could have been avoided had the government engaged in consultations with experts and conducted a public consultation. On issues that affect so many people in this province it is a disappointment that the government failed to engage in meaningful debate and consultation.

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The B.C. Human Rights Coalition is a non-profit community-based organization. We strive to promote and strengthen the human rights of British Columbians through advocacy, education and law reform.