

Long term care standards closer to reality in Ontario

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"Furious George" may have put the question of long term care standards over the top, but workers brought it to the table.

CUPE members in the long term care sector have been pushing to reinstate legislated standards of care for long term care facilities since the Mike Harris government eliminated them in 1995.

The campaign went on right up until Feb. 27 when two long term care workers used four bottles of water to fill an adult diaper at a press conference at Queen's Park.

They wanted to show how much urine had to be in a diaper before care aides were allowed to change it under current rules.

The workers - Margaret Manning and Candace Rennick - repeated CUPE's call for a 3.5 hour daily minimum care standard for residents in long term care facilities.

In reaction, Health minister George Smitherman mused that he might try wearing an adult diaper to show his critics their concerns - concerns his own government supposedly shares - were not founded.

The [reaction to his statement](#) was universally negative. [Editorials](#) and [letters to the editor denounced](#) his comments. Some [called for his resignation](#).

But most observers just called on the province to get on with the job of improving conditions in the province's long term care homes.

Indeed.

CUPE had hoped that the McGuinty government would repair some of the damage done to long term care when it took power in 2003 - the Liberals had made declining quality of long term care one of their election issues.

But in 2006, when the government actually tabled legislation they claimed would fix the damage done by the previous government, CUPE - which represents 24,000 workers in 217 Ontario long term care homes - and others were underwhelmed.

CUPE Ontario renewed its campaign for standards in long term care in January 2007.

[CUPE Ontario argued](#) that [Bill 140](#) - among other shortcomings - failed "to ensure even minimal accountability for meeting residents' assessed needs and improving accountability of government."

For their part, the Liberals argued standards could and would be added to regulations after the bill was adopted.

Bill 140 became law in June 2007 and Liberal promises - restated during the 2007 provincial election - to regulate care standards failed to materialize.

CUPE Ontario and the [Ontario Council of Hospital Unions](#), partnered with the [Ontario Health Coalition](#), stepped up the pressure, producing radio ads, surveying members, and eventually conducting rallies and information pickets.

Long term care patients in Ontario still do not enjoy a 3.5 hour standard for daily minimum care, but they are a lot closer to seeing it now.