

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Let's stop genetic discrimination

Genetic testing allows individuals and families to understand if they have a genetic marker(s) that may lead to developing certain health conditions.

As well, it provides a chance to participate in research studies to better understand certain health conditions and create better treatments. With approximately 33,485 genetic tests available, it's important we ensure individuals are aware of the consequences of getting a genetic test.

Currently, individuals who undergo genetic testing can be compelled by insurance companies and employers to disclose their results and may be denied employment or insurance because of their genetic characteristics. Unfortunately many individuals are getting genetic tests without knowing the risks. However, individuals who understand the consequences of getting a test, decline to get a test out of fear of it being used against them. As a result, some individuals refuse to participate in tests for clinic research that have the potential to eliminate certain diseases.

Individuals should never have to choose between a life-saving medical test and employment or insurance. There is a belief that if you are found to have a certain genetic characteristic tied to a specific disease or condition, that you will ultimately develop the disease or condition. That is not the case.

That is why I co-sponsored Bill 30 ? the Human Rights Code Amendment Act (Genetic Characteristics), 2016, introduced by Eglinton-Lawrence MPP Mike Colle. Bill 30 is an opportunity to raise awareness about this important issue of genetic discrimination and informing individuals what their rights are. Additionally, it is an opportunity for us to protect individuals who are unaware of the unintended consequences of getting a genetic test, by incorporating genetic characteristics into the Human Rights Code as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

Canada remains the only G7 nation without specific safeguards in place against genetic discrimination. Ontario has an opportunity to take a leadership role and ensure a person's rights, including their genetic characteristics, are protected, specifically related to employment and insurance.

Bill 30 was debated and passed second reading in the legislature Nov. 3, with unanimous support from all three parties. I am happy all parties see the need for this legislation that will provide the necessary protection to an individual's genetic characteristics. Bill 30 has now been sent to the Committee on Justice Policy for public input and for amendments. This is an important step in the process to seeing Bill 30 passed into law.

If you have any questions or would like more information about Bill 30, please contact my office at 416-325-1898 or sylvia.jonesla@pc.ola.org

If you would like a copy of Bill 30, please visit my website www.sylviajonesmpp.ca

It's time for the law to catch up with the science.

