

## LOCAL NEWS

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# Opposition urges independent status for Human Rights Commission **LATEST NEWS**

The Telegram

Opposition Justice Critic Kelvin Parsons says the Human Rights Commission should be an independent office of the House of Assembly, and not report directly to the Department of Justice.

Parsons says he has submitted this recommendation to the public consultation team reviewing Newfoundland and Labrador's Human Rights Code.

A news release notes that the Auditor General's 2008 report on Departments and Crown Agencies outlined a number of concerns with the operations of the Human Rights Commission. This included a 57 per cent increase in caseload, a backlog of complaints dating back several years and procedural problems with the way in which complaints are investigated and monitored.

"Public confidence in the protection of human rights in this province relies heavily on the appearance of the commission's independence," Parsons said. "While the department of justice may have policies and procedures in place to ensure the independence of the commission, the fact that 43 human rights complaint investigations involved a government department or agency raises legitimate concerns of conflict."

Parsons noted that human resource shortages were clearly the number one issue for the Human Rights Commission over the past five years. However, because the commission is a division of the Department of Justice, any requests for increased funding would not be disclosed to members of the House of Assembly or the general public.

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