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MEDIA RELEASE
October 7, 2002

Coroner's Inquest Recommends Significant Changes to Ontario Fire Service

SUDBURY, October 7, 2002 – Nelligan O'Brien Payne today announced a significant advance in the public and fire fighters' safety as a result of recommendations from a coroner's inquest jury in Sudbury, Ontario.

On Friday, the four-person jury issued its verdict after 20 days of evidence during which they heard from over 60 witnesses. The inquest was called as a result of a tragic house fire in the City of Greater Sudbury in April 2001 in which two pre-school children and their great grandmother died. The closest fire hall to the fire was not staffed with fire fighters and the next closest hall was staffed with only one full-time fire fighter on duty. During the inquest, emotionally charged evidence was heard from neighbours who desperately tried to reach the occupants as well as from the full-time fire fighter who entered the house in a rescue attempt.

The Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association, IAFF Local 527, the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association (OPFFA) and the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) were represented at the inquest by Nelligan O'Brien Payne. In addition to determining the causes of death, a coroner's jury has the ability to make recommendations with the intent of preventing tragedies in the future.

The jury issued 24 recommendations. Some of the more significant recommendations included:

- A regulation that municipalities provide information on tax assessments indicating the level of fire protection in the community;

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- An independent and comprehensive audit of the Ontario Fire Marshal's operations to review its role and effectiveness in the province;
- Immediate staffing of three fire halls with full-time fire fighters on a continuous basis in the area of the City of Greater Sudbury where the tragic fire took place;
- A regulation that all municipalities prepare a master fire plan including standards related to coverage;
- Formal adoption by the province of a standardized incident command system;
- Formal adoption by the province of a standard for emergency services communications centres.

The jury also requested that the recommendations be reviewed annually for the next two years with public reports filed providing an update on the status of the recommendations. The OPFFA and the IAFF have been advocating for the provincial government to play a more active role in the fire service through the adoption of standards such as those issued by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The jury heard extensive evidence that fire departments across North America utilize NFPA standards for virtually every aspect of the fire department. The jury recommended a comprehensive study of NFPA standards be undertaken.

While the recommendations are not mandatory, it is anticipated that the provincial government and the City of Greater Sudbury will have to give serious consideration to implementation of the recommendations in the interests of public safety.

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