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NEWS RELEASE

Port Authority Forced to Close Boating School

HAMILTON – The Hamilton Port Authority (HPA) will close the Harbour-West Boating School by April 30, 2003, as directed by the federal government. For nearly two years, the HPA's Board of Directors had appealed to the Ministry of Transport to amend the authority's letters patent so it could keep operating the school.

While there has been unofficial word from Minister David Collenette that the school can remain open until 2005, board chair Fred Eisenberger says this is too little too late. "A temporary reprieve is not acceptable. For the past two years we've done a lot of work to try to find a private partner to take over the operations of the school and we've not been successful. I see no reason why that would change in the next three years. As a result, we wanted the federal government to allow us to continue to run the school ourselves."

The Harbour-West Boating School has been operating for 27 years, and is considered one of the finest training programs in Canada. The school offers instruction to about 2,000 children and adults each year, including training to various federal bodies (such as the Coast Guard, Environment Canada and Public Works), the Police Marine Patrol Unit and industries on the port.

Until 2001, the boating school was operated by the authority's predecessor, the Hamilton Harbour Commissioners. The successor HPA was established under the Canada Marine Act, which allowed the organization to run a boating school only until the end of April, 2003. The budget for the school last year was \$310,000, and the HPA covered a shortfall of revenues over expenses of \$35,000.

"We always lose a bit of money running the school," says Mr. Eisenberger. "As a good corporate citizen we've covered this modest shortfall. We believe the boating school is a valuable community service that requires and deserves a long-term commitment from the federal government and the HPA. While we were prepared to make this commitment, the federal government was not." He adds that without the Harbour-West Boating School, options for Hamilton area children and adults to receive boating instruction are severely limited.

Mr. Eisenberger says the HPA has indicated to the federal government that it will continue to attempt to find a private operator for the school, but is not optimistic on that front – given the loss incurred each year, and given the fact that the City of Hamilton owns the boats and equipment.

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