

# Foreign-trained accountants fear fines under Ontario law

Say new bill preventing them from using their credentials creates barrier to working here

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For more than a decade, Martin Saxton, an accountant originally from Scotland who now has a Toronto business, has printed the professional credentials he earned in the U.K. on his business cards and resumes.

Saxton, who runs Arrow Accounting and Bookkeeping on Danforth Ave., uses his Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) designation, a credential he says is internationally recognized and that takes an average of three to four years of study to earn.

But now he, like other foreign-trained accountants, fears he will be penalized under a recent Ontar-

io law. Under Bill 158, Saxton says he will have to stop using his U.K. professional designation in promoting his business, or face a fine of up to \$10,000.

There are roughly 1,000 people working in Canada with credentials from CIMA. As well, there are about 2,500 who have a designation from the U.K.-based Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), another internationally recognized body.

Members from both groups are hoping they will be granted exemptions from the Ontario law, which they argue is a barrier to foreign-trained professionals.

"Is the government willing to openly say that immigrants with foreign-earned qualifications are substandard and should always be subservient in this country?" asked Mahes Wickramasinghe, a spokesman for CIMA in Canada.

"Like it or not, that is what would be legislated," said Wickramas-

inghe, a Sri Lankan native who worked extensively in England, the U.S. and the Caribbean before coming to Toronto two decades ago. He currently works for a subsidiary of CIBC in Barbados.

The dispute has drawn the attention of British diplomats. Jonathan Dart, the British consul general in Toronto, raised his concern at a meeting with the attorney general's ministry last week.

But the Ontario government says the bill is meant to ensure greater transparency for the public and give regulators new powers to protect consumers.

Accountants in Ontario do not have to be licensed to file income taxes, for instance, or be a financial adviser. But they must be a member of one of three Ontario regulatory bodies if they perform audits.

Paul Costello, head of ACCA in Canada and the U.S., says people should not be charged and fined for using foreign credentials unless



Martin Saxton, a native of Scotland who now runs a Toronto accounting business, worries he will not be able to advertise his foreign credentials.

they present themselves as chartered accountants when they are not. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario objects to the use of foreign credentials because it would lead to a proliferation of accounting designations by people not subject to Ontario regulations. Peter Varley, the institute's spokesman, says it is no different than the rules for foreign-trained doctors and lawyers, who are prohibited from using foreign designations in Ontario.