



THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL

January 23 2019

PRESENTATION TO:

The Honourable Vic Fedeli
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

Good evening everyone.

Thank you to the Minister of Finance and everyone else in the Ministry for allowing me to be part of the 2019 Ontario Budget Consultation. My name is Mitch Pratt, and I am the President of the University Students' Council at Western University. Our organization is democratically elected by, and accountable to, the 30,000 undergraduate students at Western University.

Today, I'd like to speak to you about the recent announcement from the Ministry of Training Colleges, and Universities.

The government's recent news regarding OSAP is disappointing for students and families. While the government's objective was to focus on providing financial assistance to those who need it the most, we have seen a reduction in the amount of grants provided to students at every income level. It is important to recognize that a 10% overall reduction to tuition with these reductions to OSAP mainly benefits students who come from families making over \$170,000 a year since they were not eligible for financial aid in the first place. With expected financial contributions to education from both parents and students being raised, as well as a transition away from grants into loans, this policy negatively impacts low-income and middle-class families the most.

I would also like to highlight concerns around the government's "Student Choice Initiative" that would allow students to opt-out of services that student governments, like ours, provide. At their core, student governments are the democratic voice of students and keep our universities accountable.

But over time, we've grown to be much more than that. We've filled gaps in services that our university does not provide. We've come together with our municipality to build partnerships, benefiting students, as well as the local economy. And what the "Student Choice Initiative" does is undermine the years of democratic work that we have done for students, as requested by students.

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Our organization is a proud member of OUSA - The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, who spent this past November meeting with Ontario MPPs, including the Premier, to provide recommendations to improve the lives of students. I hope those recommendations, as well as my remarks today can provide more context as to why we hope the government reconsiders the changes to OSAP and the implementation of the Student Choice Initiative, an initiative that will make life more difficult and expensive for not only students, but families and the Ontario taxpayer.

How so? Our student government provides health and dental plans at significant discounts to over 21,000 students, thanks to our collective purchasing power -- that's money saved for students and millions of dollars worth of burden taken off the taxpayer through OHIP+. Our ability to negotiate and administer these plans are at risk with the Student Choice Initiative. Student governments are one of the largest employers of students on campus. We run food and beverage operations, support services, and many more where students are employed to enhance the experience of their peers. The Student Choice Initiative undermines the protection and creation of jobs on campus. The 300+ students we employ at Western alone will be at risk.

In our most recent student survey, Western students claimed that the bus pass was the #1 service that we provide. We provide that bus pass to student with over \$21 million dollars in savings PER year -- that's \$720 saved per student because of agreements we've signed with the London Transit Commission -- and without students, transit in London is not sustainable. But our transit agreement doesn't just ensure financial savings. It also ensures that our student population has access to a safe ride home, and that they can explore and contribute to the London economy.

Part of this government's commitment was to reduce red tape, and put more money in the pockets of taxpayers. The Student Choice Initiative IS red tape and a burden on the taxpayer. The changes to OSAP are making life and education more expensive for families. I urge this Ministry to work with the Minister Fullerton to understand how these changes will make life more expensive for students and families. If affordability is the government's concern, there are better avenues to address this. If accountability is the government's concern, there are other policies that can address this. But the Student Choice Initiative is shown to fall short of this government's commitment to the people of Ontario, and the students who will be the workforce of tomorrow. If the Ontario government truly wants to move Ontario forward - they must recognize that this initiative will put everyday Ontarians behind.

Thank you very much for your time.

Mitch Pratt

USC President

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