

University and college faculty, students, and staff call on Ontario government to protect workers' rights and withdraw Bill 47

TORONTO, November 5, 2018 – The Ontario Universities and Colleges Coalition (OUCC), which represents more than 435,000 faculty, students, and staff at every public postsecondary institution in the province, is calling on the Ontario Government to protect decent work laws. Millions of workers, including hundreds of thousands employed by or studying at Ontario's universities and colleges, depend upon basic rights that are now at risk.

At a press conference this morning, representatives of the OUCC detailed their concerns about Bill 47, which would eliminate important protections for precariously employed contract and part-time workers, including the \$15 minimum wage, equal pay for equal work, fair scheduling, paid sick days, and fairer rules for joining a union.

If passed, these rollbacks would fundamentally undermine efforts to ensure universities and colleges are model employers who provide job security, fair pay, and benefits for their employees, many of whom are also students. Existing rules requiring that part-time and contract employees receive equal pay for doing the same work as their full-time colleagues was set to provide enormous improvements to the lives of thousands of faculty and support staff at Ontario's colleges.

"Part-time and contract faculty and staff work hard and deserve equal pay for equal work," said RM Kennedy, Ontario Public Service Employees Union College Faculty Division Chair and a faculty member at Centennial College. "Repealing these laws will not just hurt these workers, it will hurt their families, it will hurt their communities, and it will hurt students."

Repealing these laws would also affect students. Many work part-time jobs to help pay for their education and are forced to juggle work and class schedules. Freezing the minimum wage at \$14 will make it more difficult for students to pay for tuition, rent, food, and textbooks. In addition, repealing fair scheduling rules will make it harder for students to balance their work shifts with classes and the time they have to set aside for schoolwork.

"Ontario has the highest tuition fees in Canada, and students already struggle to pay for their postsecondary education," said Nour Alideeb, Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario and a student at the University of Toronto–Mississauga. "For students working both on and off campus, reducing the minimum wage, cancelling fair scheduling rules, and repealing equal pay provisions will make it even more difficult to pay the bills."

At universities and colleges across the province, over half of faculty are now employed through precarious contracts without job security, and are often paid less than their full-time

colleagues for the same work. Many are forced to juggle work at multiple institutions just to make ends meet.

“Living contract-to-contract with low pay and anxiously awaiting news about whether we will be hired to teach the next semester is incredibly stressful,” said Kimberly Ellis-Hale, contract faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University and Chair of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations’ Contract Faculty and Faculty Complement Committee. “We should be making progress in addressing fairness for contract faculty, not rolling back reasonable and essential improvements to workers’ rights.”

Academic working conditions are students’ learning conditions, so the rise of low-paid precarious work on Ontario campuses has major implications for education quality. Many students will also be impacted by the repeal of two paid sick days each year. Without paid time off for illness, they will be forced to choose between going to work sick or losing a much needed paycheck.

“The rise of precarious work on Ontario campuses impacts students and the quality of education students receive,” said Hamish Russell, an international graduate student and Canadian Union of Public Employees member at the University of Toronto. “The new labour laws introduced last year provided the foundations for fairer campuses with better working and learning conditions for students.”

Faculty, students, and staff across Ontario know first-hand how important existing labour laws are for the well-being of our families and communities. Ontario workers deserve fair wages and good jobs, including at our universities and colleges. If this government is truly for the people, it should do the right thing and withdraw Bill 47 immediately.

The Ontario Universities and Colleges Coalition represents over 435,000 faculty, staff, and students from every public postsecondary institution in Ontario. It includes members of the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, Ontario Public Service Employees Union, Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers’ Federation, Public Service Alliance of Canada, and United Steelworkers.

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