

OUCC Opposes Bill 307 and Ford's Attempt to Silence Workers and Students

TORONTO, ON, July 21, 2021 — The Ontario Universities and Colleges Coalition (OUCC), representing over 435,000 faculty, staff, and students from across the public postsecondary education sector in Ontario, strongly opposes the new provincial election spending rules that are outlined and enforced by Bill 307, *Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act*, 2021. With the use of the Notwithstanding Clause, the government has imposed Bill 307 despite a court decision declaring the law unconstitutional based on the harm that this kind of legislation would cause.

The next provincial election is scheduled for the summer of 2022 and this is a pivotal moment for Ontario politics. Ontarians have struggled and sacrificed through this pandemic, owners of big businesses have become more wealthy, and this government has overseen the demise of Ontario's vital public institutions. The next provincial election will be key for those in the post-secondary education sector. Our communities need tangible action and investment from the provincial government to overcome the serious challenges facing Ontario's chronically underfunded post-secondary education system.

Robust campaigns run by independent democratic organizations are vital to our electoral system. They educate the public about important public policy issues that directly affect their lives and show the public how they can engage in the electoral process and make a difference.

Far too often, information around post-secondary education issues are lost during large election campaigns broadly focused on winning votes, not necessarily addressing the challenges facing our public post-secondary education system. The imposition of Bill 307 does not remedy this issue. Rather, it hinders the ability of students' unions, labour unions, and other independent democratic organizations to educate their members and the public on the nature of provincial elections, democracy, and the importance of their participation. It is also vitally important for under-represented groups so that they can leverage the pooled resources of their unions and associations to engage in broader conversations in advance of and during elections.

Ontario students and youth are a major demographic of voters and yet they are the age group least likely to cast a ballot. Students' unions play an important role in educating their members (some of whom are first time voters) as well as informing the public about issues such as tuition fees, mental health, healthcare access for International students, and funding changes within the sector.

The restrictions outlined in Bill 307 have placed additional limitations on “third party organizations”—undermining collaboration between students and workers on campus and community coalitions.

Democratic student, worker, and community groups organize important elections-based events, including on-campus all-candidate debates, community meet-and-greets with candidates, and information sessions on the issues and how to vote. The creation of these events involves joint outreach and shared expenses. This type of collaboration is vital for local, membership-based organizations hosting election events that highlight local issues—especially for marginalized groups looking for relevant and accessible elections-related content.

The rules imposed by Bill 307 penalize independent democratic organizations for working collaboratively to serve their communities. This unconstitutional legislation will hinder the discussion of important public policy issues, including those impacting post-secondary education; and undermine effective promotion and equitable participation in Ontario’s electoral process, particularly for students. Taken together, these changes cast a dark shadow over the province's future.

Signatories:

- ▶ Kayla Weiler, National Executive Representative - Canadian Federation of Students– Ontario (CFS-O)
- ▶ Sue Wurtele, President - Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)
- ▶ Karen Littlewood, President - Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF)
- ▶ Alex Silas, Regional Executive Vice-President - Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)
- ▶ Naureen Rizvi, Ontario Regional Director - Unifor
- ▶ Janice Folk-Dawson, Executive Vice-President – Ontario Federation of Labour

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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