

23 May 2019

Deputy Minister Karen Hughes  
Treasury Board Secretariat  
99 Wellesley St W  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1A1

Dear Deputy Minister Hughes,

The Coalition of Post-Secondary Workers of Ontario (CPWO) writes to you today with considerable concern that the government is currently contemplating substantial interference in the collective bargaining rights of non-academic post-secondary workers of Ontario. Founded in 1974, the CPWO is an umbrella group of staff associations and unions at Ontario post-secondary institutions. Our membership includes administrative, clerical, professional and technical occupational groups.

The discussions that took place on May 3, 2019 left us with many questions and grave concerns with the direction in which the government appears to be headed.

The Government of Ontario funds approximately 35% of university operating budgets, yet at the meeting on May 3, 2019, this government made it abundantly clear that it wishes to control 100% of our compensation. We are, however, not government employees, but rather the employees of autonomous educational institutions with whom we engage in free and fair collective bargaining pursuant to our rights under the *Labour Relations Act* and s. 2(d) of the *Charter*. Any attempt to strip us of these rights is not only inappropriate but illegal and unconscionable.

There is a wide degree of variation between post-secondary institutions in Ontario with respect to resources, employee-labour relations, regions, and cost of living. These differences widen further when comparing the post-secondary education sector to the wider public sector. The suggestion that a 'one size fits all' legislated approach would be beneficial is shortsighted and does not take into consideration these important factors. In contrast, free and fair collective bargaining is a flexible process which allows us to work with the employer to agree to sustainable levels of compensation. We insist that our right to collectively bargain with our employers be allowed to continue without interference.

This government states that it is interested in "reasonable public sector compensation growth," yet the salaries for non-academic post-secondary staff within our member organizations have consistently been below the rate of inflation. We submit to you that the current levels of growth are reasonable and sustainable (if not already unduly restrained), while slower growth would constitute an unreasonable demand on post-secondary workers, who would likely see their real wages diminish at an accelerated rate.

Moreover, other participants in the consultations have brought to your attention that the operating budgets of our employers, the Colleges and Universities, have not met the rate of inflation.

Given this context, the government's focus on post-secondary workers is troubling. Our workers and our students deserve better than a fiscally starved post-secondary system that will continue to lag in wage increases. Staff and faculty are the lifeblood of Ontario colleges and universities, and attacking our rights is thus very detrimental to the delivery of quality post-secondary education.

This government's supposed 'fiscal crisis' is not the product of "unreasonable public sector compensation," but rather unreasonable cuts by government to its sources of revenue. Ontario's per capita own source revenue for the most recent year is well below the average for the other provinces. The province should not be subsidizing its revenue cuts on the backs of our hardworking members. Ontario's budget can be balanced but it should be done without harming post-secondary workers who play a vital role in the education of the next generation and the leaders of tomorrow.

The government's current "consultations" appear to be taking place for optics only. The limited time frame, procedural deficiencies, and skewed assumptions upon which these consultations are based suggest that the conclusion is a *fait accompli*. We would like to make it abundantly clear that our participation in these "consultations" in no way, shape, or form indicates our agreement with this government's plans or process. As well, the present government "consultation" process does not in any way equate to free and fair collective bargaining, nor does our participation in this process in any way limit our right to collectively bargain, as protected by section 2(d) of the Charter. Moreover, it is our position that any government proposal that includes compensation restraint or other limitations on the collective bargaining process constitutes an infringement of the freedom of association.

We fervently oppose any attempt to undermine the rights of our post-secondary workers. Non-academic workers keep our post-secondary institutions functioning at high levels and provide important services to the students and workforce of this province every day. We implore the government to reconsider the legislative actions it is considering.

Respectfully,

The Coalition of Post-Secondary Workers of Ontario Executive Board