



# Laura Mae Lindo

## MPP Kitchener-Centre

Hon. Ross Romano  
Minister of Colleges and Universities  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor 438 University Ave  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

August 18, 2020

RE: Post-secondary Education supports

Dear Minister Romano,

I am writing to you today to ask for your response to the urgent concerns from post-secondary students in my riding of Kitchener Centre, and from across Waterloo Region. As you likely know, Kitchener Waterloo boasts of 2 Universities, 5 colleges and numerous satellite campuses. The impact of cuts to post-secondary education was having a disastrous impact on students prior to COVID-19, and now, with further questions left unanswered, students need your help.

On July 23, 2020, I hosted an Ontario Students Assistance Program (OSAP) roundtable to discuss issues affecting students with regards to cuts to the program. We spoke to participants in the College and University sector, students who had received notices that their OSAP amounts would be drastically reduced, and those that had decided that they had no choice but to defer their post-secondary entrance because they could simply not afford university or college without getting adequate OSAP support.

On May 14, 2020, following weeks of uncertainty of COVID-19, I hosted a virtual conversation with post-secondary students and representatives about the support they needed in the midst of the pandemic. Between the roundtable and the virtual conversation, there have been a number of demands from my constituents calling to reverse the cuts to OSAP and invest in post-secondary education.

During the virtual conversation, a graduate student representative called on the provincial government to provide students with the much needed tuition fee relief and an investment in social services to meet community needs that have resulted from online delivery of classes.

Another community member and post-secondary student asked that online education delivery be matched with supports to mitigate gaps that result from lack of in-person contact, a pre-pandemic issue exacerbated by social distancing.

Lori Campbell, Director of Shatitsirótha, spoke about tuition fee forgiveness for Indigenous students, whose land post-secondary institutions operate on. She said that jurisdictional purview causes governments to ignore indigenous issues by shifting responsibility which fails indigenous students repeatedly.

Sana Banu, President of Advocacy at Conestoga Students Inc. said that international students are having a host of problems and they need relief from skyrocketing tuition and relief programs for recently graduated international students. She said that international students come to Canada because they are

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told job prospects are increased by studying in Canada and when those promised jobs are not guaranteed, it leads to unemployment, isolation, financial insecurity, an inability to pay rent, buy food and meet basic needs. All of these problems are further exacerbated due to the pandemic.

Representatives from student unions across Waterloo Region have also voiced that they are concerned about the cuts to OSAP. Cuts to OSAP have increased debt burdens and threatens the continuation of academic study for many students.

I have compiled the following ten demands that were relayed during the roundtable discussion and virtual conversation into the following list:

1. Regulate and put a cap on International tuition fees. International students are paying up to 4x more than domestic students due to deregulation.
2. Provide relief programs for recently graduated international students. Job offers often fall through and because incentives for International students to study in Canada are tied to job prospects, without relief programs, they are left without unemployment, financial insecurity, and inability to pay for rent, buy food and meet basic needs.
3. Rent protection for students so they are not paying exorbitant fees while trying to survive the costs of living while they are studying.
4. Online education delivery must be matched with supports to mitigate gaps that result from lack of in-person contact, a pre-pandemic issue exacerbated by social distancing.
5. Tuition fee relief. Students shouldn't be forced to drop out of college or university because they cannot afford to continue. Students shouldn't have to balance work while studying, only to graduate with lifelong debt.
6. Invest in equity services that can meet community needs to fill gaps that have resulted from online delivery and ensure that Black, Indigenous, racialized and LGBTQ2S students have the supports they need to thrive in post-secondary.
7. Ensure that Indigenous tuition fee forgiveness is in place to provide a stronger pathway to post-secondary education for Indigenous students.
8. Address technological needs of students (e.g., computers, laptops, internet access etc.) as online course delivery has become the chosen method for post-secondary institutions to ensure students are kept safe during the pandemic.
9. Address jurisdictional issues that continue to cause governments to ignore issues facing Indigenous students by shifting responsibility between provincial and federal jurisdictions.
10. Reverse cuts to OSAP so that more students can access post-secondary education.

Please let students know how you plan to address their call for better supports. Students deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,



Laura Mae Lindo, MPP  
Kitchener Centre