



## UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO EDUCATION WORKERS

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*Executive Committee*

28 February 2019

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28 February 2019

Topic: URGENT: Changes to O.S.A.P. and post-secondary funding

*Vice Chair, Unit 3:*

Kristin Cavoukian

Dear MPP Jessica Bell:

*Vice Chair, Unit 5:*

Glenna Kramer

We are writing to you to express our dismay at the changes made to the post-secondary education sector and the Ontario Student Assistant Program which the government carelessly constructed under the guise of making post-secondary education more accessible. At CUPE Local 3902, we represent almost 10, 000 members at The University of Toronto, around 8, 000 of which are both students and workers. Our members know that these changes are only making education more inaccessible. This new model further adds to the hardships of our members, who are already all precariously employed.

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Although the 10% tuition cut sounds great on paper, there are several issues with this proposal. A compulsory 10% tuition cut with no compensating increase to government funding will have a huge negative impact on post-secondary education, especially for workers at colleges and universities, low-income students, and students who rely on campus wellbeing and accessibility services. In addition to this, making ancillary fees optional hurts our student unions, equity-based organizations and community spaces on campus, and makes it difficult for them to adequately represent our interests.

*Executive Director:*

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Tamara Williams

Moreover, we see these changes as having a negative impact on workers on campus, especially those in the teaching and service roles. What we will see as a result of the devastating funding cuts to post-secondary budgets are increased class sizes with no compensatory teaching hires. We will see a diminished ability to protect worker and student health and safety. We will see job losses as organizations and departments are forced to let go those with the lowest seniority and security. We will see dirty campuses, overcrowded classrooms, and unengaged students. Members of CUPE Local 1281 are already facing job cuts, and we know that other trade unions may see lay-offs as well.

How can post-secondary Employers bargain fairly and freely with labour Unions when the current government has effectively slashed their budgets? Are we being set up for a system in which private funding and corporate interests will be the only option for fully funded post-secondary institutions?

Likewise, the changes to O.S.A.P. are despicable. They are short sighted, inconsiderate and leave students vulnerable to an intense amount of debt following graduation. Eliminating the O.S.A.P. tuition grants for low-income students will make post-secondary education even less accessible to under-privileged members of our society. Eliminating the six-month interest-free grace period for student loans will increase the student debt burden and make post-secondary study still less accessible to low-income students.

Many student loan holders will be forced to take on extra work in addition to their studies. This means economically underprivileged students will be scrambling to find part-time, short-term, precarious employment as Ontario's economy shows no signs of increasing the number of full-time stable jobs. This means that the moment students walk out of University, degree in hand, they will incur interest on our loans despite not being in a suitable financial position to pay back our loans. The 6-month grace period allowed students to gather their resources, calm their heads, and plan for the future without being put at a significant financial disadvantage. The Ford Government has taken that away and created a structure that advantages those already in economically stable environments. This further increases the divide between wealthy and poor undergraduate and graduate students and workers.

CUPE Local 3902 has made it a priority to push back against these cuts however we can, as they have a negative impact on all our fellow members, students, and allied organizations. We demand the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party commit to reversing their policy changes to O.S.A.P. by restoring the six-month interest-free grace period and the 2018 model of grant and loan ratios, and match the ten percent tuition cut with an equal increase to government funding for Ontario colleges and universities. We call on our MPPs to express our concerns in legislature and to fight alongside us for changes that will have a positive, not a negative, impact on our members.

All residents of Ontario will be feeling these cuts to the post-secondary sector, and more public sector cuts just keep coming. These changes do not bode well for a more equitable, prosperous and healthy Ontario.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee  
CUPE Local 3902  
University of Toronto's Contract Academic Workers