

July 17, 2020

Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
438 University Avenue, 5th floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Lecce

The recent decision by the government to introduce and ram through Bill 197, *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*, has profoundly alarmed and disappointed the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO). Amongst a variety of proposals, this omnibus bill makes significant changes to Ontario's publicly-funded education system and occupational health and safety. The government's decision to fast track Bill 197, *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*, without any public input prior to or during the legislative process undermines public confidence in our democratic society.

Unlike the previous attempt to revise the health and physical education curriculum through public consultations, the Ford government has made no pretense of public consultations for these changes.

The changes proposed to our publicly-funded education system by this bill, particularly during a pandemic, erode public trust in the political system, especially when these changes do not resolve any immediate pandemic needs. To use the pandemic as political cover for these changes is transparently disingenuous.

Additionally, the Ford government's decision to bypass legislative committee hearings or public hearings denies all stakeholders an opportunity to address their concerns to legislators. Ramming this legislation through with no input or oversight by the public or legislators is an insult to our democracy.

We respectfully request that the proposed schedules within the legislation related to publicly-funded education and occupational health and safety be removed from this omnibus bill. The government should then initiate a process of public and stakeholder consultations on these proposals. Only after those consultations are completed should the government introduce stand-alone legislation. Afterwards, the legislative process should allow for standing committee hearings to ensure full transparency.

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We strongly believe that public engagement and discourse is critical when it comes to changes to the publicly-funded education system. It is important that the Progressive Conservative government allow for public input and scrutiny, rather than engaging in a process that is insular and shuts out public voice.

Yours truly



Harvey Bischof
President, OSSTF/FEESO

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