

OPSEU/SEFPO 2022/23
Pre-Budget Submission to the
Standing Committee on Finance
and Economic Affairs

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Introduction

Ontario has been fighting through the COVID-19 pandemic for almost two years now, with an end point that is still uncertain.

This has undoubtedly been one of the most difficult times our province has ever faced. Many lives have been lost and that number keeps rising every day. To finally bring an end to this pandemic will take a strong collective effort. To ensure that Ontario is well-equipped to face the future, will require us to learn from the lessons of the past years and rebuild.

Ontarians have been relying on our public services more than ever, counting on them to be pillars to hold up our province during this difficult time.

OPSEU/SEFPO's 180,000 dedicated and highly skilled members have been working on the frontlines every day, providing care for Ontarians and ensuring that our public services are safe and dependable. They are on-the-ground experts with the lived experience of keeping our public services going during this time of crisis. They have in-depth knowledge of where the fault lines are and what must be done to restore and strengthen our province.

In the 2022/23 budget, the Ontario government must prioritize five key actions to protect Ontarians through this crisis and ensure that our public services are strong enough to withstand each and every future challenge that comes our way:

- Build capacity
- Improve workplace health and safety
- Repeal Bill 124
- Remove privatization from our public services
- Strengthen long-term care

OPSEU/SEFPO's members care deeply about the health and well-being of all Ontarians. That's why our members have been showing up to work every day, risking their lives and giving their all under high stress working conditions. We are there for all the people in this province that count on us.

It will take a massive collective effort to get to the other side of this pandemic, to recover, and to rebuild afterwards. OPSEU/SEFPO's members and leadership are ready and willing to work together with the government to recover and rebuild successfully.

Build Capacity

OPSEU/SEFPO's members have been speaking out against cuts to public services for decades. When the pandemic hit, the damaging effects of those cuts came to the forefront. To ensure Ontario's public services are strong, reliable, and well-equipped to meet the ever-increasing demand for services, massive and urgent investment across all public services is necessary.

Below are OPSEU/SEFPO's recommendations for building capacity in the public sector.

Hospitals

Decades of cuts and under-investment in health care led to serious issues in our hospitals even before the pandemic began: chronic staffing shortages, ambulances lined up outside ERs, 'hallway health care', and crumbling infrastructure.

These long-neglected cracks in our health care system have now resulted in a system that is overwhelmed and unable to meet the extremely high demand for care, forcing the government to impose long and ruinous lockdowns across the province.

The government's recent promises of investment in health care have been a notable step forward, but there is a lot more that must be done to build capacity in our hospitals. OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Build more publicly-run and properly funded hospitals to address the severe lack of capacity

- Commit to global funding increases to health care of at least 5.5 per cent per year
- Establish a committee that includes health professionals to outline a human resources strategy that addresses the labour shortages across sectors
- Create a third-party organization that collects data to help decision-makers track how many health care workers will be retiring and how many positions will be needed to be filled over a 5–10-year time frame
- Invest in increased permanent full-time positions in order to avoid staff taking on multiple jobs just to make ends meet and fill the labour gaps

Community Health Care

The pandemic has demonstrated the critical role of local public health units and their effective response under the current model. We urge the government to maintain the current Home and Community Care coordination function of LHIN staff within the new Ontario Health Team model.

To strengthen our Community Health Care system for years to come, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Offer full tuition support for PSWs through public colleges, which would provide an incentive for students and address the province's long-standing PSW shortage
- Address systemic wage gaps through a more comprehensive and inclusive approach that eliminates lower wage

rates for the same work performed in community settings

- Scrap plans to consolidate the current 34 Public Health Units into 10 regional health entities. As the pandemic has demonstrated, the current model allows for solutions to be tailored to local communities. Consolidation risks reducing service quality and access in rural areas.

Ambulance

The role of Paramedics and Ambulance Communications Officers is evolving. They no longer solely respond to 9-1-1 emergencies – they now have broad community involvement, care and increased responsibilities during a crisis.

The government's investment in improving and expanding 9-1-1 services has been a positive step forward, improving access to care at a time when our health care system is under immense strain.

Ambulance workers play an integral role in our health care system. In recognition of ambulance workers' increasing roles and responsibilities, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends mandating a \$4 per hour immediate and permanent base wage increase, applied to all paramedics regardless of employment status or certification level.

Mental Health & Addictions

The pandemic exposed the cracks in the mental health system and the limits and gaps of the social safety net. The government's new investments to mental health under *Ontario's Roadmap to Wellness* are a good start to recognizing the tremendous need for more services across the province; however, to further strengthen the mental health system, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends the following solutions:

- Expand community-based mental health counseling services and early intervention
- Improve staffing ratios and create more full-time positions in hospitals to stem growing retention problems
- Increase 24-hour integrated mobile crisis teams across all communities and provide stable, and permanent funding
- Expand community-based addictions services and eliminate for-profit treatment clinics
- Provide leadership to work with other levels of government to create supportive housing programs in every community
- Expand Mental Health court locations and hours to provide better access to marginalized communities; provide culturally-competent and trauma-informed services within the justice system; and to significantly improve access to mental health court supports specific to Black and Indigenous individuals

Social Services

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

The chronic retention issues in the developmental services sector have been felt heavily during this pandemic, exacerbated by the prevalence of part-time work and low wages. The temporary wage increases provided by the government underscore the need for a permanent across-the-board increase. Further, OPSEU/SEFPO is concerned about the stated government intention to move to a direct funding model in this sector.

We recommend that the government:

- Increase base funding to agencies to transition from a part-time to a full-time work model, expand supportive housing, and agency-based programs
- Implement temporary pandemic pay at the \$4 per hour rate across the board for all workers who in the developmental services sectors
- Implement a province-wide central bargaining table to ensure that workforce standards and conditions are consistent and fair

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

The pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of racialized communities who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and face systemic barriers such as poverty and racism. The overrepresentation of Black, racialized and Indigenous children and youth served by Children's Aid Societies must be addressed within the service delivery model.

The government's modernization plan cannot succeed without a re-visioning of the funding formula to achieve its goals of expanding prevention, early intervention, and supporting children, youth, and families from marginalized communities.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Change the funding formula to include an increase to base funding to Children's Aid Societies to expand the delivery of prevention and early intervention programs
- Invest in more frontline positions to reduce the systemic workload burden and improve retention in the field
- Establish a fully public and accountable housing system for youth in care. The mostly private residential group care has failed youth in care in Ontario. Eliminate for-profit care in group homes (Outside Paid Resources (OPRs)). OPRs provide substandard housing and services for vulnerable youth
- Fund the embedding of equity, anti-oppression, anti-Black racism, and Reconciliation programming into all areas of service delivery in the child welfare system

COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Since 2020, the non-profit sector has been hit exceptionally hard; some non-profits have had to shut down (such as community-based arts and sports programs), some shifted to remote work and program delivery (employment, newcomer

services), while others have remained open to meet increased demand during the crisis (shelters, food banks, mental health supports).

Ontario's community agencies need immediate support and investment to keep providing service to our communities. OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Provide targeted support programs to nonprofit organizations that have specifically been affected by closures to support their operating expenses, including the Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program
- Provide access to immediate funding supports which are essential to providing services to Ontarians during Modified Step Two restrictions - to purchase PPE, update health and safety such as HEPA filters, provide dollars to fill immediate staffing gaps, and purchase technology to keep open and serve Ontarians

Child Care

Child care is essential to Ontario's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has demonstrated that child care is key to contributing to economic rebound, especially to power the return of women to the workforce.

To support Ontario's families and childcare workers and make childcare in this province affordable, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Finalize the deal with the federal government under the new national Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) program

- Establish a base wage rate of \$25 per hour to create a stable, qualified and dedicated professional workforce and provide funding for benefits and pensions
- Transition from a market-driven service to government program by expanding the non-profit childcare which already constitutes 79 per cent of childcare delivery

Community Legal Clinics and Legal Aid Ontario

Since March 2020, there has been a massive surge in demand for legal aid services as Ontarians face evictions, job loss, domestic violence and other issues. In 2019, Legal Aid Ontario suffered a 30 per cent budget cut (\$133 million). In 2020, Legal Aid Ontario faced a funding shortfall of \$60 to \$70 million. This funding crisis could decimate front-line services struggling to assist some of Ontario's most vulnerable population. OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government immediately increase funding to Legal Aid Ontario and community legal clinics to ensure that all Ontarians have access to justice services.

Shelters

The Ontario government provided municipalities an additional \$150 million in 2020 to improve homeless shelters and create opportunities for longer-term housing. Increased investment is important to support the vulnerable members of society who rely on the services that shelters provide. Homeless shelters have been hard-hit by the pandemic and rates of violence against women have gone up.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Increase base funding to Violence Against Women services to expand a fragile system
- Increase funding to create and provide supportive housing for individuals with severe mental health and addictions challenges who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

CHILD TREATMENT

Children's mental health services are needed now more than ever. In response to a growing demand for mental health services for children and youth during the pandemic, the government stepped in with a \$12 million investment. However, even prior to the pandemic, wait times for 28,000 children and youth for mental health services were up to 2.5 years. This is not sustainable.

The government must commit to directing a significant portion of its promised mental health and addictions funding of \$3.8 billion over ten years, including matching funds from the federal government, to develop a responsive and strong child and youth mental health system.

To do this, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Improve workforce retention and address the wage gap between community mental health providers vis-à-vis their counterparts in education and health
- Increase funding to expand the capacity of the public delivery service model for children and youth mental health

Boards of Education & Cultural Institutions

The chronic problems facing our public schools – overcrowded classrooms and inadequate staffing levels – have proven to be even more damaging during the pandemic. Many education workers, who are on the front lines of this pandemic every day, are demoralized, underpaid and burnt out after almost two years working through the challenges that have come with this pandemic, including rapidly changing public health guidelines.

Education workers need the government's support to resolve chronic staffing issues. OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Develop a province-wide recruitment plan and incentives to encourage students to enter the field and receive training through college-based education programs
- Increase wages and benefits to retain current qualified casual education workers
- Increase wages and benefits for newly hired qualified education workers

Ontario Public Service

The current hiring freeze across the Ontario Public Service (OPS) contributes to a lack of capacity to deliver the public services Ontarians rely on. New hiring is all on a temporary basis, which creates an unstable workforce and does not allow the OPS to build capacity with employees who are committed to a career in the public service.

While every ministry suffers from understaffing, the staffing crisis in Ministry of Health ambulance call centres, which has been going on for years, has reached a breaking point. It is impossible to attract and retain staff when most other dispatch centres pay much higher wages. Half of OPS Ambulance Communications Officers leave once they are trained for dispatch centres that pay more and are less stressful.

To resolve these issues and build capacity within the OPS, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends the following solutions:

- Lift the hiring freeze and hire full-time, permanent staff to the Ontario Public Service instead of temp staff
- Address the (often very large) pay gap between OPS jobs and comparable jobs at other levels of government or the private sector. Approve “special cases” that are filed for special pay increases for those positions where comparable positions pay considerably more, including those for Ambulance Communications Officers.

Corrections

In 2020, the government invested \$500 million for new Corrections infrastructure and front-line correctional staff. This is a start, but more must be done to address the Crisis in Corrections.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Continue updating and building new institutions as soon as possible in order to house inmates more safely and humanely and provide them the programming and health services they need, both during and after the pandemic

- Increase staffing in every institution immediately, starting with full-time, permanent Correctional Officers, to ensure there is enough permanent staff in institutions to provide proper oversight and programming for offenders
- Hire more full-time permanent community corrections staff, including but not limited to hiring additional Probation and Parole Officers to start group offender rehabilitation programming six months prior to an inmate’s release
- Establish a process of continuity of service from incarceration to community supervision.
- Bring back “Community Resource Centres” (formerly known as provincial halfway houses) for parolees who lack a parole sponsor and/or suitable housing, thereby reducing the overcrowding crisis of our Ontario Correctional facilities
- Reopen additional mental health secure facilities instead of placing inmates with severe mental health issues in jail in order to decriminalize mental illness and place those in crisis where they will receive the proper treatment and support from properly trained staff
- Bring back forensic custody facilities for the mentally ill. Much of the inmate overcrowding in our institutions and the increasing levels of violence within our correctional facilities is due in large part to the ever-growing inmate population afflicted with mental health ailments. Offenders with mental health challenges often pose risks to themselves and others, requiring the use of segregation as a means to negate

such risks. Forensic Correctional Centres would help solve the inmate overcrowding, violence and segregation crises. They would ensure that mentally ill inmates receive the medical services, supports and treatment they so desperately require.

Colleges and Universities

The pandemic has exacerbated and exposed the damage done by underinvestment in postsecondary education. The government's imposition of performance-based funding will only deepen the damage, forcing colleges to compete against one another and potentially leading to the elimination of critical – but currently low-waged – programs focused on social services and support.

This crisis has also exposed the reliance on precarious workers in colleges and universities and their vulnerability to economic shocks. Support staff were hit by layoffs and the hardest hit were the most vulnerable: part-time support staff. In addition to this, crushing workloads also continue to be a huge issue for college faculty, three-quarters of whom are precarious contract workers.

The push towards micro-credentials is another worrisome development. Students need an education that will provide a whole body of knowledge and skills on which to build a career, not a partial qualification that sets them up for a life struggling from one gig economy job to the next.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Abandon performance-based funding
- Invest in Ontario's public colleges and universities
- Invest in students by offering free or reduced tuition
- Invest in stable, full-time jobs in colleges and universities
- Invest in counselling and mental health supports for students
- Invest in greater supports for Admissions, International Student Services and Student Advisement
- Establish a class-size cap for online classes
- Only offer micro-credentials in situations where the micro-certifications add value to an existing credential

Improve workplace health and safety

COVID-19 has threatened workplace health and safety for all frontline public service workers. OPSEU/SEFPO members have taken extra precautions in their workplaces to prevent the spread of COVID-19 but in the wake of the Omicron surge, additional support from the government is necessary to ensure that workplaces are safe for workers and the public.

Across all public sectors, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends the government take the following actions:

- Provide appropriate PPE for all frontline workers
- Invest in improving the air quality in all workplaces, including the installation of HEPA filtration
- Increase access to paid sick days for all workers, provided on a permanent basis (the three days currently provided until July 31, 2022 is not sufficient to cover the length of the isolation period required for COVID-19)
- Implement vigorous procedures to identify and track workplace outbreaks and to bring in measures to prevent the spread once the outbreaks have been identified

In addition to these recommendations, below are further actions that are important to strengthen workplace health and safety in our public services.

Youth Corrections

Youth justice workers in transfer payment agencies continue to provide care to youth during the pandemic often without WSIB coverage or the same working conditions as their counterparts in directly operated closed custody facilities under MCCSS.

In 2016 the government was told by an independent body that these two systems should be merged into a single system to improve and standardize training, hiring practices, health and safety, policies and procedures, standards, and compensation.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Create an integrated system for youth justice directly operated by MCSS;
- Pass Bill 191, *Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act (Presumption Respecting COVID-19)*, 2020, to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to include COVID-19 as an occupational hazard and covers essential workers who test positive for the illness; and
- Pass Bill 194, *WSIB Coverage for Workers in Residential Care Facilities and Group Homes Act*, 2020, to include residential care facilities and group homes in Schedule 1 of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.

Boards of Education & Cultural Institutions

Two of the largest workplace health and safety concerns for education workers have been, and continue to be, COVID-19 prevention and violence in the workplace.

Violent incidents in the classroom were a growing problem prior to COVID-19 and the pandemic has increased the deficit of qualified education workers available to provide appropriate programming and support to vulnerable students.

In addition to this, the nature of their work makes social distancing difficult for education workers, who have been going into classrooms to provide in-person support to students who could not be accommodated through remote learning. They have been putting their own health and safety on the line throughout the pandemic, especially considering many of the students they support are mask-exempt and are unable to observe social distancing.

OPSEU/SEFPO members working in public schools are passionate about supporting students and need the government's support to ensure that they can do their work safely. OPSEU/SEFPO recommends:

COVID-19 prevention

- Regular asymptomatic testing in schools
- Smaller class sizes to increase physical distancing
- A provincial cleaning standard for schools

- Increased staffing to carry out the additional work that these measures would entail

Violent incident reduction

- Standardize reporting procedures with paid time to debrief and complete the necessary reports
- Provide all staff that enter a school with paid time after school hours to review student OSRs, revise and review student safety plans, complete documentation, and attend team meetings. This is especially important for Educational Assistants who are in the class with these students every day
- Increase qualified education support staff
- Increase quality of training for staff teams
- Implement clear protocols across the province
- Define staff to student ratios, including supervisory time

Ontario Public Service

The pandemic has undoubtedly changed how employees in the OPS work. It is important that the government prioritize proactive planning for emergencies and pandemic situations going forward and keep in mind that they are responsible for the health and safety of their employees who are working from home.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Modernize health and safety and WSIB legislation to ensure that workers who are working from home have the coverage they need if they are injured while working
- Provide safe, ergonomic equipment for employees who are working from home

Corrections

Almost two years into the pandemic, very little has been done to improve the air quality and ventilation inside correctional institutions and P&P offices. In addition to this, probation and parole offices do not have an effective way to keep guns and other weapons out of their offices, creating a health and safety risk for staff and clients.

To improve the workplace health and safety in Corrections Institutions, OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Take steps to improve air quality in all workplaces, including the installation of HEPA filters, and retrofitting institutions and offices
- Mandate that no Probation and Parole staff work alone at an office and that a metal detector be installed in every office

Repeal Bill 124

Bill 124, *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019*, is an unconstitutional attack on all public sector workers. It denies public sector workers the ability to negotiate fair wage increases through collective bargaining.

This is an unjust attack on all public service workers who have been giving their all throughout the pandemic to keep public services going. It unfairly targets the majority-women workforce in our health care system who have been saving countless lives; education workers and social services workers who go above and beyond in already low-wage jobs; frontline workers in LCBOs, who are already employed in temporary and casual positions and aren't guaranteed hours, to name only a few.

Recruitment and retention is a major issue in many of our public services, including long-term care, corrections, colleges and universities, to name a few. Bill 124 only serves to exacerbate the problem at a time when it is urgent to ensure that our public services can meet the ever-increasing demand for service.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that Bill 124 be repealed. Besides being unconstitutional, imposing three years of effective wage cuts on front-line public service workers is making these staffing shortages in health care and social services worse.

Remove privatization from our public services

In Ontario, successive governments have turned to the private sector to deliver public services for decades; however, this increased reliance on the private sector has not resulted in improved access to services or increased value for money. Instead, it has done Ontarians a great disservice. It has decreased accountability, quality and access to service.

Below are a few of OPSEU/SEFPO's pressing concerns with regards to privatization and proposed solutions to resolve these issues.

Hospitals

With growing demand on the health care system, the government has repeatedly looked to the private sector for solutions. Privatization of health care leads to increased costs, poorer quality of services, safety concerns for patients and staff, lack of regulations, and the violation of the Canada Health Act by charging patients for medically necessary services that are covered by our publicly funded universal healthcare system.

When services are managed and/or delivered by private, for-profit entities, taxpayer dollars are wasted on duplicate layers of administration and private profit-making. Auditing and regulation of for-profit services also becomes impossible since providers are accountable to their shareholders, not to patients.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Stop the contracting out of vital hospital support services such as housekeeping, food services, environmental services, and IT to name a few
- Focus resources on increasing capacity in public labs instead of spending taxpayer dollars on privately-owned labs.
- Stop openly handing out contracts for COVID-19 testing and lab services to giant for-profit companies such as Shoppers Drug Mart and Rexall instead of focusing resources on increasing capacity in public labs. This has resulted in Ontarians being forced to pay up to \$300 to private labs to get PCR tests, making this important testing an exclusive option for those who can afford it.

Community Health Care

The pandemic has exposed the negative impact of the profit motive in health care. The prevalence of for-profit companies in home care have undercut adequate wages, benefits and full-time work.

The Ontario government must eliminate the for-profit motive which has undermined quality care and retention in the field. The government must cease renewal of contracts of for-profit companies and upload home care services to a public service delivery model.

Ontario Public Service

Privatization and contracting out is rampant throughout the OPS even though it has been proven that privatized public services are more expensive and less reliable.

In the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Landlord and Tenant Board is hiring staff from temp agencies instead of hiring temp staff internally, and this has caused a huge backlog in hearings and follow-up on orders.

Service Ontario call centres are contracting out Tier 1 and some Tier 2 calls to private companies. This means that when Ontarians call Service Ontario, their first point of connection, and sometimes their second one too, is to an outside company. As a result, it takes longer for the public to get their issues resolved. Further, it also puts our private information at risk when we speak with people who are not public servants and reduces the number of good public sector jobs at a time when we need good jobs the most.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Stop privatizing and contracting out work that is done by OPS employees
- Bring previously privatized public services back in-house, such as the Service Ontario offices mentioned above

Corrections

Privatization and contracting out is a real problem in Corrections right now. OPS Corrections staff are the experts at both institutional and community corrections and are much better suited to do corrections work than private agencies and contractors.

The Ontario Monitoring Centre is being closed, and the GPS monitoring of offenders in the community is being contracted out to a third-party vendor. There are serious implications for accountability, public safety and privacy. Any updated technology and procedures should be carried out by OPS Correctional workers, not third-party vendors.

Temporary staffing agencies have been used to fill nursing, PSW and cleaning positions in some institutions. Temporary agencies not only cost more than hiring staff directly, they provide precarious employment and no benefits for employees who work in one of the most challenging workplaces in the province.

Corrections work is also being contracted out to agencies outside of the Ontario Public Service, including training for Correctional Officer recruits and discharge planning for offenders.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Cancel the closure of the Ontario Monitoring Centre and use community corrections staff to run the expanded GPS monitoring program in the community instead of a third-party vendor

- Stop using temporary agencies to fill vacancies. Instead, fixed-term contracts should be issued, with an eye to converting as many fixed term contracts to permanent positions as possible
- Stop contracting out corrections work to agencies outside of the Ontario Public Service. Keeping work like discharge planning for offenders and training of correctional staff in-house and overseen by one body (the Ministry of the Solicitor General) reduces bureaucracy and increases public accountability.
- Halt the expansion of privately-owned LCBO Convenience Outlets
- Allow the LCBO to sell cannabis. The LCBO has a long and proven track record of selling alcohol responsibly and maximizing public revenues. The government must give municipalities the option of choosing the LCBO as the retailer of cannabis in their communities

Strengthen long-term care

LCBO

The LCBO has been selling alcohol safely and responsibly for decades and LCBO workers pride themselves on protecting children and their communities. They prioritize customer service, health and safety and social responsibility in their work and can be trusted to be responsible, reliable, accountable and dependable. In addition to this, the profits from traditional LCBO stores provide billions of dollars a year into building this province. The privatization of alcohol distribution and sales does a disservice to Ontarians in the long-run.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Stop the piecemeal privatization of alcohol distribution and sales, including 7-Eleven stores getting a liquor license to effectively put a bar into a convenience store where members of the community, including children, go to buy food staples and candy

Long-term care has been one of the sectors most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Long-standing capacity and staffing problems in the long-term care sector were exacerbated by the virus, resulting in numerous outbreaks in Ontario's long-term care homes and thousands of lives lost.

Bill 37, *Providing More Care, Protecting Seniors, and Building More Beds Act, 2021*, was a positive step forward in implementing much-needed improvements in Ontario's long-term care system; however, much more still must be done to protect workers and residents as COVID-19 continues to spread rampantly through LTC homes.

Ontario has an aging population, with insufficient long-term care homes and beds to meet the growing demand for care. Further, there aren't enough long-term care staff to meet the needs of residents in the LTC homes we have, and the low-paid, precarious work does little to help recruitment and retention.

The damaging consequences of allowing privatization to enter our long-term care sector has been made extremely clear during this pandemic, with an increased likelihood of outbreak and fatality in for-profit homes. When it comes to the lives of our province's most vulnerable, profit should not be a part of the equation.

In addition to this, many LTC home buildings are outdated. Many still have ward rooms which increase the spread of infection between residents and put both residents and staff at risk. This has been a pressing issue for many years, particularly during cold-weather seasons when viruses are more likely to spread.

OPSEU/SEFPO recommends that the government:

- Invest in full-time jobs with better wages and benefits for all worker classifications in this sector in order to improve staff retention
- Mandate and enforce patient-to-staff ratios so that LTC homes keep an appropriate level of staff on duty to provide care
- Mandate and enforce a minimum of four hours of care per resident per day, evaluated per home and not as an average for all long-term care homes
- Update building codes for long-term care homes and eliminate ward rooms as quickly as possible from all homes
- Enforce all of these provisions by giving inspectors from the Ministry of Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Labour the power to take punitive action, up to and including the suspension of the home's operating license, if they do not comply
- Remove profit from long-term care. The profit motive is what keeps long-term care homeowners from hiring and scheduling enough staff to care for their residents, from paying their staff enough to retain them, and from updating their buildings and providing enough PPE to keep their residents and staff safe
- Put a freeze on issuing licenses for private, for-profit organizations in long-term care, and build new, publicly funded homes and beds in order to improve affordability and quality of care for residents, and proper working conditions for staff
- Use public land to build publicly funded and publicly run long-term care homes, instead of selling off public land to private equity funds, for-profit developers, and private, for-profit corporations to build LTC homes
- Ensure that there are enough long-term care home inspectors in the Ministry of Long-Term care to carry out both comprehensive, annual inspections on every long-term care home every year, as well as reactive inspections in response to complaints and critical incidents

- Ensure an adequate number of inspectors are available to carry out unannounced health and safety inspections on long-term care homes
- Give all inspectors the ability to enforce the rules and penalize LTC home operators who break them, with fines and even suspension or revocation of operating licenses when necessary

Conclusion

If we've learned anything during this pandemic, it's that we have to work together to survive. And after the pandemic, we'll have to work together to thrive.

Strong public services ensure that we work well together. They are the “great equalizer,” giving everybody the same access to safe and healthy communities, a good education, and a real chance to contribute

Ontarians are yearning for stronger public services. The pandemic has shown them the gaps in our public services and, in poll after poll, the public is demanding better. They understand that big investments now will pay bigger dividends in the future.

As we examine what has to be done to support Ontarians and recover from the damaging effects of this pandemic, our focus must be on rebuilding capacity, improving workplace health and safety, repealing Bill 124, turning away from privatization and strengthening long-term care.

Working together, this government and the dedicated public service workers in OPSEU/SEFPO can help build a better future for all.

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced, horizontal light blue lines across the entire page. The background is white, and there are no margins, text, or other markings present.

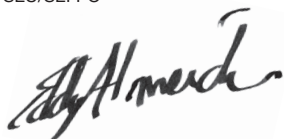
This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Authorized for distribution by:



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