



May 13, 2025

The Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Premier's Office, Room 281
Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A5

and

The Hon. Nolan Quinn
Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security
5th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

Sent via email to Premier@ontario.ca and Minister.MCU@ontario.ca

Dear Premier and Minister,

As leaders at Seneca Polytechnic, we write with growing concern about the future of higher education in Ontario and the impact on today's and tomorrow's students.

Hardly a day goes by without a headline about layoffs, program suspensions, campus closures or mounting deficits at one of the province's public postsecondary institutions. At the very time when a highly skilled workforce is more crucial than ever to strengthen Ontario's economy against the headwinds of a trade war, our capacity to educate and train that workforce is quickly eroding.

Seneca is not immune. The steep decline in international tuition revenue—masking years of underfunding—is taking its toll.

We are writing this letter jointly because we want you to understand that the Seneca community is united in its determination to continue to offer the high-quality education our students require and deserve. We are also united in asking your government to sit down with us, and the sector, to discuss a new funding framework that will put higher education on a sustainable path and address the structural deficits we all face.

Since we represent different constituencies within Seneca, we want you to hear our distinct voices.

Sara Rodrigues, president of the Seneca Student Federation:

Students across Ontario are feeling the direct impact of chronic underfunding in postsecondary education. We've seen firsthand how reduced resources affect the quality of learning, student services, and the overall student experience. Supports that students rely on, such as academic advising, mental health services, and food assistance programs, are stretched thinner than ever.

For many, the rising cost of living paired with fewer institutional supports makes staying in school feel like an impossible choice. Students are resilient, but we're also tired. We came to college hopeful and determined, but now many of us feel uncertain about the future.

If we want students to thrive, not just survive, then this system must be properly funded. Ontario's students are not just learners. We are future contributors to this province's growth, and we need a system that invests in our potential.

Many of our peers are working multiple jobs just to afford tuition and living costs, only to find that the supports they need to succeed are no longer there or have been cut back. For international students, who pay significantly higher tuition, the strain is even more severe. Yet they contribute greatly to both our campuses and communities. When colleges are forced to do more with less, students feel it immediately and deeply.

Postsecondary education should be a path to opportunity, not a source of constant stress and uncertainty. We need stable and sustainable funding to ensure students have access to the resources, support, and high-quality education they deserve. Investing in colleges and universities is not just an investment in institutions. It's an investment in people, in communities, and in the future of Ontario.

Anna Ainsworth, president of OPSEU-SEFPO Local 560 representing academic employees:

In the span of merely 60 years the Ontario postsecondary system has become one of the most reputable in the world. The expansion of universities and the creation of the college system with intentionally well-funded policies has led to a remarkably well-educated population driving innovation and our economy.

Most significantly, access to high quality postsecondary education has been an essential component of continuing to grow our democracy.

Postsecondary education used to be accessible only to the middle and upper classes; we created a system that offered all students access, regardless of their class. We offered all students the skills necessary to thrive in a dramatically changing world.

In this moment of renewed Canadian national pride, the social goods that we take pride in are at risk because we have lost sight of a vision of society that ensures that we all have access and can all contribute.

This moment of global crisis presents opportunities to provide academic leadership.

Robust public funding in the postsecondary sector is not a choice, but a necessity if we are to maintain a vibrant economy and democracy.

Without an immediate injection of public funding and a commitment to ongoing robust support, our system will atrophy, if not collapse, and we will all be the poorer for it.

Janice Hagan, president of OPSEU-SEFPO Local 561 representing support staff employees:

Our College Support Staff provide essential technical, professional and administrative supports for hundreds of unique programs offered at Seneca Polytechnic. From Aircraft Maintenance Engineers to Zamboni Drivers, and 400 unique positions in between, staff help Seneca maintain state-of-the-art facilities, hands-on labs and essential academic records. We provide the academic supports that keep our students on track to learn and succeed.

However, due to our sudden inability to mitigate decades of insufficient funding, we are facing layoffs twice as high as anything ever experienced in our 60 years. Still, the needs of students and the workloads remain the same. Our employees are coping with the stress of job insecurity while lineups grow longer, essential services disappear, and we

are forced to watch helplessly as vulnerable students fall through the cracks, unable to develop the skills they need to become independent in today's complex economy.

The communities we serve are losing these well-paying, skilled jobs. We are also losing the student jobs in labs that help young people develop the relevant experience they need to gain employment when they graduate. These are very sad days for all of us right now. Given the contribution we make to Ontario's economy, this is so undeserved.

David Agnew, president of Seneca Polytechnic:

When Minister Davis created the Ontario college system six decades ago, he envisioned it as a response to a rapidly changing economy that required postsecondary graduates with new and sophisticated skills. Today, the province faces unprecedented economic challenges that have only increased the need for those graduates, yet the system's ability to offer students those opportunities is rapidly eroding.

Seneca Polytechnic has been a leader in higher education since 1967, and we are proud to have more than 300,000 graduates contributing to their communities every day. We are proud of our thousands of employees who demonstrate their commitment to student success every day. But over the past few months, it has become clear that we cannot take the future for granted.

While the financial issues are increasingly urgent, we also need a shared vision in Ontario about the future of postsecondary education and how it can continue to serve the needs of our economy and society. A strong education system is the backbone of a strong and prosperous province. That system needs support, commitment and investment.

As your government considers what is required to protect Ontario's economy, and what investments are crucial to creating a stronger future, we respectfully ask that the public postsecondary system be placed high on the list of priorities.

For the sake of our students, our future leaders, we stand ready to do our part.

Sincerely,

Sara M. N. Rodriguez

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Anna Ainsworth

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Janice Hagan

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David Agnew

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c: Seneca Polytechnic students and employees