



Ontario Fall 2020 Pre-Budget Submission

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President
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Preamble

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario is the largest Union in the province with more than 280,000 members. You will find CUPE members working in health care, municipalities, school boards, social services, and post-secondary education. Almost half our members work on the front lines helping to protect Ontarians from the pandemic every day. More than 500 CUPE members have contracted COVID-19 in the course of their work and at least four have died. Over 14,000 CUPE members are currently laid off because of the pandemic.

We are disappointed that your consultation process limits us to a very short written submission or a three-minute oral presentation with no questions. Government budget consultations should foster two-way dialogue with stakeholders and the public. With 2020 throwing so many challenges at us as a society, meaningful consultation is needed more than ever.

We would refer you to our budget submission of January 24, 2020 for more fulsome discussion of our pre-pandemic concerns with the fiscal direction of this government.

The Cardinal Rule of Government is to keep its Residents Safe: This Government Needs A Change in Direction to Protect Ontarians from COVID-19

We are living through an unprecedented global pandemic. In March, Ontarians shut down the economy. We stayed at home to give the government the time necessary to implement the public sector supports we need to protect ourselves from COVID-19. Seven months later, daily case numbers are higher than they have ever been and growing exponentially. Our schools are failing to provide the physical distancing needed to prevent transmission from one family to another. Testing capacity has not met demand. Some public health units have given up tracing contacts because they cannot keep up. The Ontario Hospital Association has warned that hospital capacity could easily be overwhelmed if infection rates are not reduced. Outbreaks are growing in long term care facilities, daycares and other institutions serving vulnerable populations. At the same time, LTC facilities which historically have had staffing issues are in crisis because their low wages and poor working conditions have resulted in their being unable to recruit enough staff to adequately provide services for our elderly and vulnerable residents. The pandemic has highlighted the faults in government austerity measures at a time when more Ontarians rely on and recognize the public good inherent in these services.

In addition, this pandemic has thrown a spotlight on the inequities in our society and the risk they pose to all of us. The essential service work of the pandemic is disproportionately done by women and racialized minorities working in precarious low pay positions such as PSW's, cleaners and grocery clerks. Working multiple part-time jobs, without paid sick leave or the ability to advocate for health and safety measures, these Ontarians are the ones most likely to get infected, which in turn endangers their families and the public. When the needs of the poorest are not met, the risk of infection increases for everyone.

If the Ontario government is going to successfully contain this pandemic, they will need to shore up our public services. They are doing the heavy lifting to protect us from COVID-19 while still meeting their important mandates that allow Ontario as a society to function. These services keep us healthy, care for our parents, educate our children, move us from one place to another and provide us with clean drinking water to name a few of the vital functions they provide.

Equally important, the pandemic will not be contained if the Ontario government does not address the inequalities in our society. The tragic failure to protect our workers and residents in Long-Term Care tells us that we cannot have a society with such pronounced differences in health and economic outcomes and expect to contain the virus. If we do not address wages and working conditions of the precarious working poor, we will not be able to contain outbreaks. We will all be at risk.

This will take a very significant change of direction for this government. We strongly urge you to re-think your previous positions and make the changes necessary to protect Ontario from COVID-19.

Here are CUPE Ontario's Recommendations:

- 1. Reverse all the announced and implemented cuts to our public services from the 2018-2019 Ontario budgets. Invest in stronger quality public services delivered by the provincial or municipal governments or not-for-profit agencies.**
 - Increase funding to support a minimum Long-Term Care standard of 4 hours of direct care in nursing and personal support, per resident, per day.
 - Address the low wage, precarious nature of work in LTC, childcare, home care and shelters through universal wage enhancement grants for anyone earning less than \$20.00 per hour in these settings.
 - Make permanent the investments made for the 2020-21 school year in school boards and add a further of \$1.153 billion towards education supports.
 - Increase funding to social services. Provide multi-year funding commitments so that the agencies can plan ahead.

- Raise OW and ODSP rates by 55% to bring them in line with historical levels.
 - Increase funding of affordable public, not-for-profit childcare spaces. Impose a moratorium on any new for-profit childcare spaces with a 10-year plan to transition away from the for-profit model.
 - Increase University funding to cover the 10% tuition fee reduction. Halt the promotion and certification of private career colleges as alternatives to public universities.
- 2. Provide unconditional grants to compensate Municipalities, Hospitals, Child Care Centres, Universities and other Public sector organizations for all their pandemic-related revenue losses.**
- 3. Provide additional funding to allow for the safe operation of public programs and services during the pandemic:**
- Ensure a sufficient and reliable supply of PPE, including N95 masks, for all front-line health care workers, childcare staff, shelter staff and first responders. Regulate their usage to ensure all staff in these settings have adequate training and access.
 - Order private industry to produce N95 masks in Ontario.
 - Provide the funding necessary to keep their children safe in schools and in childcare centres.
 - Fund and mandate maximum class size of 15 students.
 - Double the \$60 million allocated to improve ventilation system.
 - Double the amounts provided for additional cleaning and sanitation.
 - Cover the additional costs of re-opening childcare spaces that were closed because of the pandemic.
 - Provide emergency support to childcare centres to hire additional staff to cover cleaning and safe work protocols.
- If parents do not have a safe place to leave their children, they will not re-enter the workforce.***
- Expand testing and lab capacity to ensure that at least 90% of people requesting COVID-19 tests can have their tests scheduled and results processed within 24 hours.
 - Provide additional funds to Public Health Units to allow them trace at least 90% of contacts within 24 hours.
 - Provide additional funds and supports needed to expand Hospitals capacity to allow normal hospital operations to continue while caring for the influx of additional patients during the pandemic.
 - Provide additional funds and supports to shelters and group homes to allow for physical distancing among residents and enhanced sanitation protocols.

4. Increase Revenue and Reduce Inequality through Tax Reform

- a. Raise corporate income tax to 16%.
- b. Raise the marginal tax rate on the wealthiest 1.0% of Ontarians.
- c. Restore Ontario's corporate capital tax for medium and large corporations to 0.3% for general corporations and to 0.9% for financial corporations.
- d. Improve tax audit and compliance measures.
- e. Collect sales tax and corporate income tax from internet and social media services like Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google and impose a digital services tax.
- f. Re-introduce the cap and trade fund or introduce a Carbon Tax to wean Ontarians off of fossil fuels.

5. Create Safe and Well-paying Jobs

- a. Immediately raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and adjust for inflation every January.
- b. Repeal Bill 124 and remove the 1.0% cap on public sector wages.
- c. Immediately remove all Emergency Orders impacting workers rights and access to their Collective Agreements that were continued by Bill 195.
- d. Reverse the changes made to labour and employment standards legislation (Bill 47) which previously protected precarious workers and provided them with additional rights including paid sick time. Additionally, through the *ESA* provide all workers a minimum of ten paid sick days per year.
- e. Expand Pay Equity legislation to the private sector and provide the funding necessary to allow public sector employers to meet their obligations.
- f. Increase the numbers of Health and Safety inspectors and Employment Standards Officers to keep workplaces safe.

6. Protect the Environment by:

- a. Reverse all Schedule 6 changes in Bill 197 that weakened Environmental Regulation.
- b. Introduce a robust plan to mitigate climate change including the introduction of carbon tax or the re-introduction of the cap and trade system.
- c. Protect the green belt from overdevelopment.
- d. Make large investments in the development renewable energy and green technology.
- e. Provide additional funds for flood and wildfire mitigation to municipalities.
- f. Actively promote public sector jobs as green carbon neutral jobs.

7. Match any federal money dedicated to affordable housing and develop a clear plan to quickly build more units.

8. Declare Anti-Black Racism a public health emergency and immediately develop, with true stakeholder consultation, a comprehensive and fully funded plan to address this scourge in our communities.