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## **Students Reject the Blue Ribbon Panel's Recommendation to Hike Tuition Fees**

The Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario (CFS-O) is outraged by the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel's report, in particular the recommendation to raise tuition fees for students by 5% in September 2024, and by 2% or by consumer index price each year. The justification that students must share the financial burden of already chronically underfunded Post-Secondary institutions by increasing tuition fees is not only preposterous, but also shows a lack of insight and care for students by the government. As such, students vehemently reject the Panel's recommendation to increase tuition fees.

In our previous statement regarding the Blue Ribbon Panel, we shared our concerns about being only consultants and not members of the panel, while students are one of the primary stakeholders in the Post-Secondary Education system. Since the 1980's tuition fees have increased exponentially, making Post-Secondary Education unaffordable. Currently, students in Ontario already pay \$1,100 more in tuition fees than the national average. While the attempt to make students pay even more for the failures of government policies along with lack of per-student funding support comes as no surprise, it only reaffirms our position that the Post-Secondary Education system can only be improved with students' direct input. Without the input of students, the government continues to take another dangerous step towards the privatization of Post-Secondary Education.

In the report, the rationale to lift the tuition freeze is to help alleviate the burden of exorbitant cost of tuition fees for International students is nothing but a performative excuse. Minister of Colleges and Universities, Jill Dunlop has also admitted that colleges and universities have depended on increasing International student fees to offset costs. Yet, there are no tangible solutions or promises made by the government as tuition fees for International students continue to be deregulated, allowing colleges and universities to continue to charge whatever the amount they want.

“As we have consistently demanded, students deserve a barrier-free education and we know that comes from having free education for all, grants not loans and education justice for all students. It is alarming that the report continues to emphasize a need for an efficient model of operations of our institutions – post-secondary institutions are not businesses and must not be treated like they are. Students already contribute a lot financially to Post-Secondary Education and they play an integral role making the colleges and universities diverse and unique – that is not only invaluable but immeasurable,” says Mitra Yakubi, Chairperson at the Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario.

As we have noted time after time, the current model of funding for Post-Secondary Education is unsustainable. The government must increase per-student funding and reduce tuition fees while ultimately working towards eliminating tuition fees for all students. Students in Ontario deserve free education. Free education is the only way to guarantee access to education for all. Any tuition fee framework that plans to increase tuition fees is one that fails to consider the lived realities of students across the province.

Students in the province are already faced with a growing number of barriers and challenges and they cannot continue to be left behind and be expected to pay for the government's failure to prioritize Post-Secondary Education. Students will continue to organize and push back against any proposed tuition hikes and we continue to call on the government for a free, publicly-funded and high-quality education not for some, but for ALL students.

*The Canadian Federation of Students represents over 350,000 students, it is the largest and oldest provincial students' unions representing both domestic and international students in universities and colleges, including undergraduate, graduate, full-time and part-time students.*

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