



# PEGGY SATTLER

MPP London West  
Députée provinciale de London-Ouest

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Hon. Jill Dunlop  
Minister of Colleges and Universities  
14th Floor, 315 Front St W.  
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

June 20, 2024

Dear Minister Dunlop,

As you know, in late April Fleming College announced the immediate suspension of 29 programs, bringing the total number of program suspensions up to 42 in just over a year. These additional suspensions represent an alarming loss of more than one-fifth of the college's offerings, with potentially devastating impacts on students, faculty, businesses and the community.

During Question Period on May 6, I called on you to immediately pause the program closures at Fleming. On May 21, the City of Kawartha Lakes passed a motion calling for federal and provincial investment and support for Ontario colleges, specifically Fleming College Frost Campus, to maintain and expand on local academic programming and community workforce development. And earlier this week, Peterborough City Council passed a motion urging your government and the federal government to protect the 29 Fleming College programs from cancellation. I am writing today to reiterate these calls, and once again request that you direct Fleming College to pause these program suspensions. Time is needed to allow a comprehensive investigation into the reasons for these severe cuts, and for your government to take the necessary steps to remedy the problems.

It is troubling that the announcement of the Fleming College suspensions came without any consultation with students, faculty, community, industry partners, or even program advisory committees. A local business owner stated that the decision sent "shockwaves" through the local business community, and will not only limit student career options but also pose "a severe setback" to the regional economy. From my meeting with leadership of the Fleming College OPSEU/SEFPO locals, I understand there are serious concerns about the lack of transparency and consultation, and that the college has provided none of the necessary disclosure to the union as required under Faculty and Support Staff collective agreements. These concerns were set out in a May 8 letter to both you and the Premier, but to date, there has been no response.

The decision by Fleming College to suspend these 29 programs will have far-reaching consequences for prospective students and the provincial labour force. Some of the suspended programs are not offered anywhere else in the region or even the province, which means many students have lost a pathway into careers that are crucial to our communities. Many offer highly specialized training in skills and technologies that are essential to the province's sound environmental stewardship and the protection of our forests, wildlife and waterways, with graduates relied upon for employment at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ontario Parks, and other vital public services.

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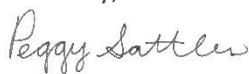
Fleming College and its students are also critical to the local and regional economy. In addition to being a major part of the talent pipeline for local employers, the college supports one in 18 local jobs and generates about half a billion dollars for the Central Eastern Ontario economy, accounting for six percent of the region's total gross product. The loss of faculty and support staff jobs and a rapidly shrinking student body will have a direct negative impact on the viability of area businesses, with profound ripple effects throughout the region. In the community of Lindsay, with a population of just 20,000, Frost Campus students make up 10 percent of the population, and the suspension of half the programs offered at the Frost Campus will have significant repercussions for local businesses and employers.

Minister, all Ontario colleges are grappling with the impact of the federal cap on international study permits and the loss of international student tuition revenues, yet no other college has taken such drastic action. At the same time, it is undeniable that a primary contributor to the crisis facing our postsecondary sector is decades of chronic underfunding, compounded by your government's cuts over the past six years. We cannot expect our colleges to effectively serve Ontarians when they are operating with the lowest per-student college funding in the country, at just 44% of the national average. Stakeholders have been sounding the alarm about how untenable the situation has become for years, with dire warnings about the serious consequences of allowing postsecondary institutions to fail. Your own government's Blue Ribbon Panel recommended an additional operating investment of \$2.5 billion over the next three years just to keep the sector afloat – a recommendation made prior to the federal reduction in international study permits. The investment you announced in February was less than half of that amount, and completely inadequate to address the scale of the crisis.

Minister, I fear that if your government does not act immediately to find and fix issues that are jeopardizing the long-term sustainability of the postsecondary sector, and significantly increase your investment in Ontario's public colleges and universities, more communities like Lindsay and Peterborough may face the closure of programs, faculties, and even entire campuses. Your government must deliver increased postsecondary education funding before it is too late to reverse the damage.

I trust that you will address this growing emergency with the urgency it demands, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Peggy Sattler, MPP  
London West

cc. JP Hornick, OPSEU/SEFPO President  
Tal Sarig, President, Frost Student Association  
Jacques Graveline, Board Chair, Fleming SAC  
Doug Elmslie, Mayor of Kawartha Lakes  
Jeff Leal, Mayor of Peterborough  
Laurie Scott, MPP Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock  
Dave Smith, MPP Peterborough-Kawartha