



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

Hon. Jill Dunlop

Minister of Colleges and Universities
Ministry of Colleges and Universities
5th Floor
438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Hon. Monte McNaughton

Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development
Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
14th Floor
400 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

July 21, 2021

Dear Ministers Dunlop and McNaughton,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA). We represent 17,000 professors and academic librarians across the province.

Our members were dismayed to see the Ministry of Colleges and Universities' memo on fall reopening of postsecondary institutions, given that the document was prepared without consultation with sector stakeholders, including faculty. As a result, the plan does not address some of the main concerns of those working and studying at Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

OCUFA recently held a consultation with our faculty associations about health and safety issues, particularly in relation to a safe return to campus given the pandemic. I write to share our members' top three concerns which are, the inadequacy of ventilation systems on campus to combat the airborne nature of COVID-19, the need to include Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSC) in return-to-work planning, and the importance of consulting faculty and postsecondary sector stakeholders in developing any guidelines for the safe reopening of campuses.

First, it is important that your ministries, and Ontario government, update their guidelines to the most up-to-date science on COVID-19, which confirms the spread of the virus through airborne transmission, and not fomite transmission like previously believed. This is essential as it dictates the measures required to safely resume in-person learning and teaching. Our members' foremost concern is building ventilation systems given the airborne nature of the virus. In particular, our members are concerned that universities are not taking this issue seriously and are promoting vague, unspecific assurances on air circulation and ventilation.

The safety of all university community members requires that university administrations follow and implement ventilation and air-quality measures that are dictated by science and ventilation experts. Further, and to safely reopen, postsecondary institutions will need adequate investments and support from the Ontario government to ensure that HVAC and ventilation systems meet the required standards. We've attached the checklist prepared by our Toronto faculty associations that provides the minimum safety standards required for a safe re-opening of campuses, that was prepared in consultation with world-renowned public health and ventilation experts at the University of Toronto.

Second, our members expect that your ministries ensure that unions and campus Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSC) are integrally involved in return-to-work planning and decisions regarding on-campus operations this fall, which as you know, is a legal requirement. I am disappointed to report that on most campuses, JHSCs continue to be sidelined since the pandemic started, even though the pandemic has made it clear that they are more important than ever for ensuring the safety of workers and administrators alike.

JHSCs ensure that campus workers are consulted and that best practices for protecting the safety and health of our campus communities are followed as preparations are made for the safe reopening Ontario's university and college campuses. As you know, JHSCs have proven to be essential in protecting the health and safety culture in the workplace, including on college and university campuses. While employers have the greatest responsibility for health and safety in the workplace, workers' input, and inclusion through JHSCs and unions representation are essential.

During the pandemic, the role of these committees and the need for cooperation between employers and unions is more important than ever.

Finally, our members reiterate how important it is that your ministries consult sector stakeholders moving forward, including faculty, in developing any guidelines for safe re-opening in the postsecondary sector. As you know, postsecondary institutions are unique workplaces, many of which are in-effect small municipalities in terms of size and complexity. Consulting sector stakeholders is vital in ensuring that the guidelines are adequate, fit these multifaceted spaces and can be efficiently and safely implemented.

We would welcome a meeting with your ministries to discuss these important points. And we would be pleased to provide additional information should you require it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Wurtele". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Dr. Sue Wurtele,

President, Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)

CC: Jenny Ahn, Executive Director, Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)