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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

SP-38

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

SP-38

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Strengthening Accountability
and Student Supports Act, 2024

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Monday 15 April 2024

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2024 pour renforcer
la responsabilisation
et les mesures de soutien
aux étudiants

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Lundi 15 avril 2024

Chair: Steve Clark
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : Steve Clark
Greffière : Lesley Flores

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Monday 15 April 2024

Lundi 15 avril 2024

The committee met at 0901 in committee room 2.

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER
AND RESPONSES**

APPOINTMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 11, a change in the composition of the subcommittee on committee business is required. I'll now entertain a motion for the replacement of subcommittee member Ms. Martin. Yes, MPP Smith?

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: I elect Ms. Pierre as subcommittee.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You can nominate Ms. Pierre, for sure.

Ms. Laura Smith: I nominate Ms. Pierre for subcommittee.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Excellent. That's great. Thank you. Any discussion? Are members ready to vote? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Congratulations, Ms. Pierre.

**STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY
AND STUDENT SUPPORTS ACT, 2024**

**LOI DE 2024 POUR RENFORCER
LA RESPONSABILISATION
ET LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN
AUX ÉTUDIANTS**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We're now going to proceed with public hearings on Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed the documents via SharePoint to all the members. To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and is understood, it's very important that participants to our public hearings speak clearly and slowly. Please wait to be recognized by the Chair, and as always, comments and questions should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions by members before we move forward? Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I would now like to ask the Honourable Jill Dunlop, the Minister of Colleges and Universities, to present. Minister, you're going to receive 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 40 minutes of questions by members of the committee. The questions are going to be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes to the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes to the official opposition and two rounds of five minutes for the independent members of the committee. I'm going to provide reminders of the time for the presenters and during the questions.

Minister, if you want to state your name for Hansard, you can begin your presentation.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, Chair. My name is Jill Dunlop, Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Good morning, everyone. I would like to start off by thanking all MPPs who spoke so passionately to this bill during second reading. I know we can all agree on the importance of post-secondary institutions in not just educating and training but as economic drivers and employers in many of our communities. We all know the importance of supporting students and mental health and anti-hate on campuses, and I would like to thank all members of the chamber for unanimously supporting second reading of this bill.

I'm pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, in more detail for all of you today.

All students in Ontario—domestic, out-of-province and international—deserve to learn in a supportive, safe and respectful environment. That's why I'm proud to bring forward three initiatives that are about continuing to create the right conditions for student success. They are about supporting affordability, inclusive and safe learning environments, all while our government is making historic investments into Ontario's post-secondary education system.

The first set of amendments in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, is a top priority for my ministry: the mental health and well-being of post-secondary students. These amendments, if passed, will require colleges and universities to have a standard policy in place for mental health, wellness supports and services for students. This will ensure that students in all corners of the province have a baseline of supports and services that they can access, with clear instructions on

where and how to access them. Going forward, institutions will also have to report annually to their board of governors on the implementation and effectiveness of these policies and conduct reviews of these policies at least once every five years.

These amendments will also allow for the issuing of a ministerial directive that can provide further direction to colleges and universities about the topics and elements in their student mental health policies. This will help build common ground amongst the institutions while also allowing them to take a tailored approach that meets the unique needs of their student communities.

As an added measure, our government will help institutions enhance mental health supports by investing \$23 million, including \$8 million for the post-secondary mental health action plan over three years, starting in 2024-25.

The mental health challenges that student face have become increasingly complex and Ontario's institutions can attest to this, as highlighted by one of our key stakeholders, the Council of Ontario Universities, following the introduction of this legislation in March. To quote their release, the COU welcomes "the \$23 million for enhanced post-secondary student mental health supports to help access to critical resources."

Mr. Chair, I have three post-secondary-aged daughters myself, and I have also taught college students, so I understand the impact academic and personal stressors can have on post-secondary students.

I remember back to when I taught at Georgian College, that, as faculty, we actually took the Mental Health First Aid training program. This was so important because we're working with young people in that very critical age group where mental health can be a huge factor, so it was important for all of us as faculty members to be able to recognize. Because sometimes, as a faculty member, you are one of the first people a student may come to for support, or at least going to know what other supports may be on campus.

The best way to make progress is to ensure that all students have access to the mental health supports that they need, and our government has ensured that, over the years, students will be able to access the supports they need, both in person and virtually. That's why our government has enhanced resources for students attending post-secondary institutions across the province.

In 2023-24, we invested more than \$32 million in mental health supports for post-secondary students, including funding provided directly to post-secondary institutions through multiple grants. And with the further investments made in budget 2024, our ministry's commitment to supporting the mental health and well-being of students only continues to grow. Through our government's efforts, we want post-secondary students to know that they are not alone and help and resources are available to them 24/7.

The legislative amendments proposed today would further build on our government's efforts to support the well-being of students. Requiring all public colleges and universities to have blueprints for their mental health supports and services will help students in Ontario have

the access to the right resources they need when they need them the most.

I think back, Chair, to when I was in university, and I don't remember having access to the kind of services that are available today. Come to think of it, I don't think there was as much of an online world as there is today. That's why I'm proud that this mental health framework will ensure that all students know about and have access to the services that are available on their campuses.

I want to thank MPP Pierre, who was my parliamentary assistant, for the fabulous work that she did in looking at this mental health framework and the consultations that you did on campuses. Because campuses are doing great work, but we want to ensure that students know the supports that are available to them on their campuses.

The second set of amendments in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, includes changes that emphasize our government's very clear stance on condemning discrimination, hate or any form of harassment in our communities.

We all agree, Chair, that every student in Ontario has an inherent right to learn in a safe and respectful environment. No student in Ontario can reach their full potential unless they have a learning environment that is safe, respectful, and free of racism and hate.

We've all heard reports in the news recently of unsettling incidents happening at colleges and universities here in Ontario, across Canada and across North America. I'm hearing about them as the minister, just like everyone else is, through social media and in the news. It's very concerning to me as the Minister of Colleges and Universities that the incidents of racism and hate on post-secondary campuses have been escalating over the past few months.

Since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023, the media reported that there have been rising tensions on campuses across Ontario. Many students reported they feel unsafe on campuses due to the instances of discrimination, anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia, concerning incidents that have been reported at institutions throughout Ontario and have involved students, staff, student groups and visitors to post-secondary campuses.

0910

Due to the serious nature of these incidents, institutions have pursued internal or external investigations, and many have requested the involvement of law enforcement. While post-secondary institutions have taken action to address these incidents, it's clear that a broader, more proactive approach is needed so that all incidents are dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Mr. Chair, since I was appointed to this position in 2021, I've had the opportunity to speak with students and with faculty members alike and heard directly from them about the incidents of hate on campus and the lack of reporting, lack of follow-up. So this was our primary driver in ensuring that we are bringing anti-hate legislation to the table and as part of this bill.

Our government's position on this has been crystal clear: Hate of any kind has no place in Ontario and certainly not

at our post-secondary institutions. This does not detract from the fact that colleges and universities should be a place where students feel free to exchange ideas and have open and respectful debate.

Since January 2019, all publicly assisted colleges and universities in our province have been required to have a free speech policy that meets a minimum standard prescribed by the government and based on best practices from around the world. This policy protects free speech at colleges and universities but does not allow hate speech, discrimination, harassment or any other illegal forms of speech. The free speech policy at campuses applies to all faculty, students, staff, management and guests, whether on campus or in virtual learning delivered by schools.

The Ontario Human Rights Code, which applies to all Ontario colleges and universities, prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds, including race, place of origin, disability, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and more. The safety and well-being of everyone at our post-secondary institutions is a critical responsibility of those leading our colleges and universities. Institutions have a responsibility to provide a safe and supportive learning environment and must adopt appropriate measures to address issues of racism and hate.

Since last year, I have sent two letters to the presidents of our publicly assisted colleges and universities to remind them of their role in supporting a safe and respectful learning environment and their obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code. While post-secondary institutions have taken action to address these recent incidents, issues continue to exist today, which means that more needs to be done.

That's why, if legislative changes we introduced in March pass, we will require public colleges and universities to have clear, outlined policies in place to combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. All institutions will be required to have policies and rules in place to address incidents of racism and hate when they do occur.

Direction to publicly assisted colleges and universities will ensure greater consistency with how incidents of racism and hate are dealt with and ensure they are dealt with in a timely manner, helping to create inclusive, safe and welcoming campuses and communities for all students. We will work closely with our post-secondary education and community partners as institutions implement these policies and report on their progress.

Together, we can build more diverse and inclusive campus communities where everyone feels safe, welcome and has the opportunity to succeed, and these legislative amendments will get us one step closer.

The College Student Alliance has said it best: "These proposed amendments are an excellent step in the right direction. Implementing a specific mental health policy better protects the longevity and security of programs and services for students and ensures that both colleges and universities remain accountable to the students and the ministry."

Our government is committed to producing a better future for everyone across the province, for students from all backgrounds, to promote economic prosperity for all. I know that during these challenging times, when the rate of inflation and the cost of living is forcing Ontarians to make some tough financial decisions, affordability for students and their families needs to be a priority. To keep costs of education down for hard-working students and their families, we announced in March that Ontario is maintaining the domestic tuition freeze for publicly assisted colleges and universities for at least three more years, while allowing limited increases of up to 5% for domestic out-of-province students.

This tuition freeze builds on the government's historic 10% reduction of tuition in 2019-20, along with the tuition freezes over the past four years. These changes have made post-secondary education more affordable for Ontario students and their families and must continue.

I know that I just mentioned them, but the College Student Alliance was also pleased to see our government maintain the tuition freeze. They were quoted as saying, "The CSA welcomes the additional extension of the domestic student tuition freeze. The current cost-of-living crisis has negatively impacted students across the province, and we are thrilled to see the government acknowledge the struggles facing domestic students."

We recognize that investing in your education is one of the best decisions that you can make as a young person. A college or university education opens so many doors and leads to incredible careers. But having a shared responsibility in your education does not mean that the government or your school should constantly raise your tuition, especially during an affordability crisis.

In addition to the tuition fees that students pay, students also pay for learning materials and activities associated with their programs. I have heard directly from students that they don't always have a line of sight on these additional costs until after they have selected their programs. Textbook costs in particular can pose an additional financial burden to students and their families that they were not expecting and couldn't plan for. In fact, textbook costs have increased dramatically over the years, more than 800% since the 1980s. That is more than double the Canadian house price indexes, and triple the rate of the consumer price index.

Chair, this makes me reflect back to recently, when three of my daughters were all in post-secondary education at the same time. They would get their list of textbooks for the semester, only to discover this would cost hundreds of dollars to each. And Chair, I heard directly from students about the cost, and sometimes it wasn't just the cost of the textbooks, but also the additional cost or maybe subscriptions that students needed to have, additional lab material that would be an additional cost to students, or supplementary information they may or may not need. These were all additional costs to students.

That's why the third set of proposed amendments in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024 will introduce changes that will require public colleges and universities to follow ministry directives to increase

the transparency of student fees, including the learning materials. As mentioned earlier, students have been facing financial burdens due to the costs of materials and activities associated with their programs and courses. Ontario's measures to increase transparency around the cost of ancillary fees will help students prepare for these costs and provide them with greater options when selecting courses.

Chair, I heard from students who came to me with their questions, saying "I thought tuition has been frozen, but every year I still continue to see my tuition increase." That was because of the additional fees. So we want this to be very transparent from the beginning, what their education is going to cost for that semester.

Chair, our government is committed to helping all learners access and succeed in post-secondary education on their journey so they can further develop the highly skilled workforce that Ontario is so well known for. That's why we've taken significant steps over the past years towards ensuring that learners from all walks of life can access post-secondary education and succeed once they get there. The set of amendments we introduced would go a long way to supporting a post-secondary education system that is affordable, respectful and inclusive for all learners. We will continue to work with our post-secondary partners to build a post-secondary system that embraces inclusivity and promotes success for all learners, so they have an exceptional university or college experience and they are prepared to pursue meaningful and rewarding careers.

I can tell you personally, I've had two daughters graduate in the post-secondary education system, and my youngest is about to graduate in the next couple of weeks. I personally know the great opportunities that our post-secondary education system brings for our young learners in this province, but also how important it is when we hear from our labour markets—I know all the exciting companies that are coming to Ontario—that one of the reasons they come here is because of the trained workforce we have and the opportunities that we have in our post-secondary system to upskill workers as well. We have a great system here in Ontario, one that we should all be very proud of.

0920

As the minister, I get to tour the province and visit our schools, and I'm blown away every time by the work that I see done at our colleges and our universities. MPP Sattler and I had the opportunity to be with OUSA last week during their celebration, and I think one of the faculty members who was receiving an award said it best, that these aren't just the leaders of tomorrow, they are currently leaders right now, and it's something that we should all be proud of in our communities.

With that, I will be happy to turn it back to you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks, Minister.

We'll begin with the first round of questions and 7.5 minutes to the government. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair, I want to begin by thanking the minister for being here. I truly appreciate the effort that has been put forth. For your information, I, too, am the mother of two post-secondary students—still in the midst of it; I don't see the light at the end of the

tunnel, but I congratulate you on your daughter's new accomplishments, and the others as well.

I want to dive into some issues. We talked about students today being the leaders of tomorrow, and the Human Rights Code and providing a safe environment for our children—and I refer to them as children because they're under 30 and anybody who's under 30 is young in my eyes because of my age.

We know that the Human Rights Code sometimes does not do the job on campus. Every student should have a learning environment—you discussed this—that allows them to thrive, where hate and racism should not exist and, obviously, after October 7, it became more prevalent than ever that students sometimes face an uphill battle on those campuses and, sometimes, that hate actually also involves not only other students on campus, but possibly teachers or visitors who aren't actually on campus.

What I'm asking is, what is the need at this time to introduce new anti-hate legislation to support these students? We do have a Human Rights Code, but keeping in mind that sometimes these cries for help are not heard by the universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Smith. As a mother of three post-secondary-aged daughters—and as I said, one is just completing now—and a minister, nothing is more important to me than the safety and well-being of our students and ensuring that they are supported on and off campus.

All students in Ontario have a right to feel safe on campuses, both inside and out of the classroom. While the human rights act and the code are important pieces, the kinds of policies Bill 166 would implement give students the necessary reassurance that their schools will take matters seriously and with proper attention.

It is alarming and disappointing that when we first hear of an incident of hate on campus, it is far too often through the media and correspondence, not from the institution. In some cases, several days can pass before incidents make the news, and my office and ministry team then have to figure out what went on; to ensure the student or group of students are safe; then there is an investigation under way; and what other steps could have been taken, many of which should have been started much earlier.

We also hear stories from students and parents who reach out to their school about an issue and either don't hear back, or the process ends up hurting students by either taking far too long or failing to address the issues that were brought forward.

At the same time, we have institutions who tell us that they need clear tools and guidelines to be able to adequately respond to these situations appropriately. The proposed directives will set the standards that schools and students can rely on to address instances of discrimination and preferably educate faculty, staff and students alike so that we can collectively work together to prevent future incidents.

It is also important to encourage free speech on our campuses. Colleges and universities are places where ideas are to be shared, challenged and debated freely. That means we need to be committed to ending hateful exchanges so actual debate can occur. Since January 2019, all publicly

assisted colleges and universities have a free speech policy that meets a minimum standard prescribed by the government and based on best practices from around the world.

As the minister, it is my duty to ensure our schools stay free from hate, which is why Bill 166 is so important. We all have a role to play to provide students and staff with a safe environment that is conducive to their education. Anything short of that is completely unacceptable, which is why Bill 166 will play a pivotal role in allowing the government to step up and be a part of the solution.

I know, as I said, many of us have children who are in the post-secondary system now, some who are probably approaching that age, too. But as government members and as parents, we all want to ensure that campuses are safe in this province.

Ms. Laura Smith: You provided some really great information. You talked about standards, which is so important, and the unification so that it exists. We know that there are standards within each college.

I have constituents come into my office quite often, and they talk about—very sadly, they have stories about their children. Sorry, I'm referring to them as children because they're under 30, once again. They're so sad because these students have faced hate. Sometimes, it's never adjudicated, which breaks my heart because somebody asks for help, and it's not provided.

I'm wondering if you could tell us how that's going to help the students in Ontario when they know they can get that help and know that a standard is in place.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Smith. I believe you're actually going to hear from some students this afternoon who have faced challenges on campus and have dealt with exactly what you're asking me about: the lack of follow-up. That's what I have heard from students and faculty members alike over the past couple of years. I've talked to some faculty members who met with me from University of Ottawa, University of Toronto and just their concerns. But many students and student groups across the province who brought this suggestion forward, their complaint was that when they were reporting incidents of hate—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There is one minute remaining in this round—one minute.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Okay—hate of any sort on campus, that they almost felt like there was no point in reporting it because there were no set standards; there was no follow-up; there was really no reporting mechanism in place.

So what we are looking to do as part of this legislation is to ensure that whether you make a report at George Brown College or TMU, the reporting mechanism will be the same across the board. I feel that students will feel safer when they know that this is actually being taken seriously through the school.

As I mentioned, too, the incidents that are happening on campuses, I would hear about them in the media just like everyone. There was no reporting to the ministry. So this will be part of that mechanism, the transparency, but it will also be posted for the public. I think it's important that the public understands that, yes, there may be incidents happen-

ing, but what is the follow-up and the action by the schools? It's important to understand that they are taking action—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister. Thank you for this round.

I'll now ask the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Minister, for coming to the committee today.

I wanted to begin with a comment you made right at the beginning of your remarks about the so-called historic investment that the government has made in colleges and universities. As you know full well, Minister, the blue-ribbon panel, the expert panel that you appointed to provide recommendations on ensuring the sustainability of our post-secondary sector, released a report in November and said that institutions need an additional \$2.5 billion in permanent base funding in order to remain financially viable. That report was released before the reduction in international study permits, which your own budget anticipates an additional shortfall of \$3 billion for colleges in this province. We don't know how much money is going to be lost in the university sector.

0930

My question is, given the blue-ribbon panel report, why did your government not follow through on an increase in permanent operating grants and instead allocate short-term three-year funding that is much, much less than was recommended by the blue-ribbon panel?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Sattler. Yes, you're familiar with the \$1.3 billion that we announced. This was an historic investment, the largest investment that we've seen in post-secondary education in a decade and something that I'm very proud of.

You mentioned the blue-ribbon panel and the recommendations that were brought forward. The blue-ribbon panel also acknowledged the shared responsibility across the sector—a responsibility for government, for the post-secondary institutions themselves as well as the students. We didn't see at this time that that should be a responsibility of students, the burden of increasing tuition. That's why we looked at increasing the funding for schools to the \$1.3 billion. I think it's really important because we're going to work very closely, as we always do. Part of that \$1.3 billion is \$903 million in funding. We are already working with our schools on what that allocation is going to look like for each institution.

Yes, we were hit from the federal government with the international students, so we're working closely with the schools on that as well. I'm sure you will see, and you've probably heard from your institutions, we focused on a real labour-market-driven allocation, and we came up with a formula that best supported all of our institutions and had the least impact across the board. But with that being said, part of the \$1.3 billion is also the efficiency fund to help schools find efficiencies, because we know there is a responsibility of the schools as well, and we're going to work very closely with them. That fund is there to allow schools to conduct audits, to find efficiencies, but it's not just on the schools to find those efficiencies. We have a responsibility as government, and we're going to work

very closely. We already have ideas that are being brought forward from COU and CO on possible legislative measures that we can take as government to help them find those efficiencies as well.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Minister. We actually agree that students should not have to bear an additional financial burden at this time of a cost-of-living crisis. However, the blue-ribbon panel said \$2.5 billion is needed in permanent base funding. That should be publicly funded by the government, and the government provided less than half of that.

I wanted to talk about the funding that was included in the government's historic investment for the Postsecondary Mental Health Action Plan. There is \$8 million allocated for the Postsecondary Mental Health Action Plan over three years. When you do the math, that's \$2.7 million per year, and, when you consider that there are 47 institutions in place, we're looking at an additional \$57,000 for each institution in direct mental health student supports.

I wanted to read some findings of a study that was done by HEQCO in response to your ministry's request to look at mental health supports in Ontario colleges and universities. They talked to staff who are in our colleges and universities who are delivering student mental health supports, and almost half of the staff who were interviewed talked about challenges due to funding, unpredictability, short spending periods.

One staff noted there are some one-time grants for mental health, but you'll hit a deficit the next year because you can't add permanent services with one grant. Sometimes the money is there, but there's no longevity to it. Another staff talked about the challenges of retaining staff, said not knowing how much funding will be coming through for next year makes it difficult to staff or keep a service. There is high turnover because of this. Another staff talked about the need for more advanced expertise and the challenges getting that expertise on campus.

So given that this HEQCO report came out in January 2024, and you certainly know about the financial challenges facing institutions in delivering mental health supports for students, why did you decide to allocate only \$57,000 per institution?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about a minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Sattler. The \$8 million—there's also the \$23 million that was recently announced, as well, and I want to thank our institutions for the incredible work that they are doing.

As I mentioned, MPP Pierre has had an opportunity to tour the schools, as I have as well during COVID times and after. It is interesting to see the changes that our institutions have made to the mental health services that are offered on campus. We have lots of great programs, and our schools are doing a fantastic job.

To name a few of the programs:

- the Mental Health Services Grant, \$6 million;
- the Mental Health Worker Grant, \$4.5 million;
- Good2Talk, a free, 24/7 mental health helpline for students, \$5 million, because we acknowledge that students

aren't always accessing the services that are offered on campus in-person, but that they prefer the virtual option—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move to the independent member. MPP Clancy, you have five minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I was looking at the response from some of your partners, and I guess their concern is that these directives seem to feel like red tape. I know in school boards, for example, it was a great initiative to get EDI data and have EDI staff, but it doesn't come with funding.

Now, just to echo MPP Sattler, I guess the worry is that when you add the red tape, you undo some of the funding initiatives that you've added. So when you provide funding, it helps you hire more people, but then when you have to use that money to do a lot of paperwork etc. or not trust the work that's already happening on college and university campuses, then it undermines the funding that you did propose.

Can you speak to how this might be adding red tape and that a lot of colleges and universities are indeed doing a lot already and already have a framework for mental health and so on?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Sure. Thank you, MPP Clancy, for the question. I think, obviously, we don't want to burden schools with adding red tape. I think we're government of reducing red tape, and I want to ensure that I'm not adding additional burden to the schools.

But this is work that—some are doing it well; some not as much. But we want to ensure that there is a clear process across schools, whether it's for the mental health framework or for the anti-hate policy. We want students to know where and when to access these supports.

The mental health framework—I mentioned that schools do a great job, but we want to ensure that the services and programs that are offered on campuses also meet the needs of students. If you have a campus that's primarily students who return home in the summer, we want to ensure they also have services that are available virtually, for those students to be able to access those services. We don't want students to leave school in April and have to go back to their communities and possibly wait for services there when they return to school in the fall. So ensuring that the services that are offered on the campuses are adequate—it's just bringing everything together, making it more transparent for students.

With the anti-hate—again, I think for both of these, these are things that should be done anyway by the schools. I think we can all agree—I know our schools will agree they want to ensure that students have access to the supports that are available to them, but that they're also feeling safe and supported. And so, with the anti-hate piece, that's where we were finding that, across the board, there were no similar policies in place.

I think that by having this, we're not creating a burden for something that schools should have been doing already, but we will be working with them, so I will ensure there's not any red tape burden associated with this process.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you. I do want to say, just to echo from the blue-ribbon panel, that the funding needs

to be more sufficient. As a school social worker, this was my work, dealing with student mental health in the elementary and secondary school system, and the biggest barrier for myself and staff, my colleagues, was the ratio. I do know that \$57,000 isn't adequate to even hire one full-time person and that we had a hard time keeping staff unless it was permanent full-time. So I do agree that the base funding needs to happen in order to make sure that you can recruit quality staff and that they can continue to work there and have longevity. Turnover of staff is one of the most negative impacts on student mental health.

0940

The other concern I have is the follow-through on the hate. I conducted violent threat risk assessments, for example, and in this you need highly trained staff to address threats on campus.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm worried that if we simply make a directive and have something in writing without the staff who can actually follow up and are qualified and trained and highly skilled in addressing risk, that, indeed, you won't see that impact. I worry that this will impact some free speech while not having a follow-through to prevent violent incidences like what happened at the University of Waterloo.

Can you explain how you could properly fund staff to address risk when it comes to hate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for that question, MPP Clancy. You've seen first-hand how important this will be on our campuses in ensuring that there is a transparent process in place that, when a student or a faculty/staff member makes a complaint or reports an incident of hate on campus, that it is adequately followed up, reported, and that there is an action plan in place.

We'll work closely with the schools and we're working through that process now on what the policy and the reporting mechanism will look like as we move forward.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move to the government's second round of questions: MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister. As you mentioned, during the last year, I did have the opportunity to tour most of the colleges, universities and some of the Indigenous institutes across the province. Three of the things that I heard consistently in speaking with students, especially, were concerns around mental health, concerns around anti-hate and racism and concerns around costs associated with attending post-secondary. And so, I'm really happy and pleased to see this legislation come forward because I think it really connects with the concerns that students are feeling.

I just wanted to talk to you a little bit, or perhaps ask you some questions, about tuition, cost for attending post-secondary, fees and where tuition fees and dollars are going. I know it's a benefit for students to know where their hard-earned dollars are going, and so I appreciate the work that you've done and the legislation that's in front of us around transparency and accountability when it comes to costs and providing students with an explanation of where their hard-earned dollars are going.

I'm hoping you can tell the committee a little bit more about why you think this change is a positive step for students and why you think it's necessary to make a directive around it.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for that question, MPP Pierre. When our government was first elected in 2018, Ontario had the highest average tuition across Canada. That's why we made the historic 10% tuition cut in 2019 and we immediately started seeing the positive impact to students, including providing an estimated \$450 million of relief to students. Since then, Ontario has dropped to fourth place in tuition and we hope to see that number continue to drop now that the tuition freeze is in place until 2027.

All of us have been a student at one point in our life, or we currently have children attending, but we know how expensive the whole experience can be. Ontario students deserve to have access to high-quality post-secondary education at affordable rates. Everything from tuition to books to housing, they all add up. And now that we're in the midst of an affordability crisis, it is now, more than ever, important for students to have access to an affordable education. That's why our government made a historic investment of \$1.3 billion that invests in our students without funding the system on their backs.

But I said it many times before: Education is a shared responsibility. So when I hear students and their stories—that they are charged new fees by their school and the cost of their education is going up—it is concerning. The same goes for stories about students who choose one course over another because it was more affordable, only to see that there are three required textbooks that cost hundreds of dollars, if not thousands of dollars, for their combined school year. That is simply unacceptable for the hard-working students who are the future of our province.

But education costs need to be clear and transparent, full stop. Looking at any other major financial decision, like buying a house or a car, you have the opportunity to review the costs and would be able to make a decision accordingly—you don't go in and buy a car and then find out there's extra, additional costs when you go to pick up the keys—so you know what you can afford and are in charge of your finances. Not providing students the same opportunity for textbooks or other learning costs is harmful to students, which is why I believe we need to have a clear directive around the costs of these items so students can make clear and informed choices regarding their education.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have 3:14.

Mr. Billy Pang: Good.

Minister, thank you for your presentation. Just like you, I'm a father with a daughter in post-secondary, so of course I have great concern for her mental health as well, just like our government, which is very concerned about the mental health of Ontario's post-secondary students, something I'm sure that you have an acute understanding of as formal faculty. Everyone thinks that students should feel supported on campus and have access to help if they

need it. So I was wondering if you could elaborate on how this bill builds on the previous work that you have done and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities has done.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for that question, MPP Pang, and congratulations to you as a father and to your daughter. I hope she has had a successful school year, as it comes to an end.

As a former college staff member, I saw first-hand that students find it difficult to balance the demands of their academic and their personal lives. The mental health and well-being of students is vital to their academic success and personal success. I know we've heard stories around the table today of the experience that many of us have had, either working with students at all levels of education or with our own children at home. But we owe it to our students to ensure they are supported throughout their post-secondary journey.

We all bring things into our school or work from our personal lives, and it can be really hard at times to separate that, especially for students who live on campus and cannot separate their lives. So when a student is in need of mental health supports, it is important that those resources and supports are available to them so they can focus on their schoolwork and not worry about whether they can get the supports they need.

I know when I was working at Georgian College and working with students, it was interesting to hear the various backgrounds. Not all students are coming to us directly from high school. Some are returning after another career. Some are balancing children at home as well. I remember even in my own university career, one of my good friends was a mature student who had two children at home.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about a minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I remember thinking, how does she ever balance all of this with school and work?

Before I became Minister of Colleges and Universities in June of 2021, MCU's allocation for mental health was just under \$20 million for the sector and other partners, like Good2Talk, which I mentioned earlier. This year, we are investing \$32.1 million, and that is a substantial increase for students and for schools, to ensure that we are providing the necessary resources to support our sector.

We also understand that students cannot always access in-person resources, or actually prefer virtual resources, which is why we have been major supporters and funders of groups like Good2Talk and Get A-Head, which allow students to access mental health supports wherever and whenever is most convenient for them.

Sorry; I thought you were going to cut me off. I'll just keep going. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about 12 seconds.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: You gave me that look.

These two specific programs that I just mentioned have helped thousands of students, not to mention all of the other institution-specific resources that students have access to—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks, Minister.

I'll move to the last round for the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Minister, I wondered if you could tell us why Bill 166 empowers the minister to dictate the content of the student mental health policy and the anti-hate policy instead of requiring extensive consultation with students, faculty, staff, community and experts in the development of these policies.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Sattler, for the question. That's a great one. These ideas were brought to us through students and what we were hearing on campuses and meeting with students. It's bringing the resources together. So if you're looking at the mental health framework, these are supports that are already on campus. What we're looking for is to bring them all together so that students understand what is available to them on campus and how they can access those services.

0950

We were hearing from students—and MPP Pierre brought this to us. Students were saying, "I don't necessarily know what's available for me on campus." But yet we know there's already great things happening. We fund those programs, and I know that there's great services. But students were saying, "We don't necessarily know where to find them." So this was in conjunction with working with students.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay, thank you. It's not a question of where to find the policies; it's the fact that the minister is giving herself—or whoever is in that position. The minister is being empowered by this bill to determine, to dictate the contents of those policies. I think that that is a big concern because there are legitimate questions about what these ministerial directives are going to include.

Everyone knows that for policies to be successful, you need to have the involvement of everyone who's going to be affected by those policies. That's faculty; that's students; that's staff; that's community. And you need to have the experts who understand student mental health, who understand how to respond to reported incidents of hate.

But a related question is around the provisions of this bill to exempt the ministerial directives from the requirements of the Legislation Act. All three of the components of this bill—the student mental health policy, the anti-hate policy and the financial directives—are exempted from the Legislation Act. As the minister knows, the purpose of the Legislation Act is to ensure transparency so that the people of Ontario can understand what the government is bringing forward.

So my question is: Why did the government decide to exempt the directives that are going to be issued under this act from the normal provisions that are laid out in the Legislation Act?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Sattler. Doing this as a directive allows us to act faster, to be more flexible and responsive to what's actually happening on campus. It's also the least intrusive and also maintains the autonomous nature of our schools.

The directive will be issued, but there's also opportunities to change that. If we feel that it's not working the way it should be or we're hearing feedback from the schools, we're able to change. So this is actually allowing us to work faster with the schools.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

It's not that the issue—well, there is an issue with enabling the minister to issue a directive. However, you can still issue a directive and still be subject to the Legislation Act. This bill exempts the government from any of the transparency safeguards that are included in the Legislation Act, and I think that that is a legitimate concern.

The third question I would like to raise with you is around the consequences. The bill, again, gives the minister carte blanche, full power to specify what steps you will take if colleges and universities don't comply with your specific directives about what is to be in the content of their student mental health policy and their anti-hate policy. Can you tell us what consequences you are considering for colleges and universities that don't comply with these directives that you will be issuing?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Sattler. You were talking about the directive. It will actually increase the transparency of a mental health policy framework on campus as well as the anti-hate policy. That's what we're looking for, is transparency—transparency to the general public as well.

As far as consequences, we're working with CO and COU, and what we are hearing from schools is that they needed the tools. And this is what we're doing: We're providing those tools. We're working to ensure that there is an anti-hate policy on campus and that it is a policy, as I mentioned, across the board, whether you're at one college or another or a university, that there is a similar mechanism in place that, when a student or a faculty member reports an incident of hate on campus, it's dealt with in the same manner.

We will be working closely, and what we heard for consequences is education is the key piece.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Minister. I think that transparency would be ensured if there is extensive consultation with faculty, students, staff and communities where post-secondary institutions are located, but that's not included in your bill. I also think that transparency would be ensured if the provisions of the Legislation Act that relate to the transparency of government initiatives were not exempted under this bill. So I have some major concerns about the lack of transparency of Bill 166.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: But just to get back to the funding concerns: When your government's investment in post-secondary education fell so far short—half of what the blue-ribbon panel had recommended was needed in permanent base funding. But when your government has underfunded institutions to such an extent—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Yes, MPP Pierre?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I don't think we're here to talk about the blue-ribbon panel. We're here to talk about mental health funding, anti-hate and racism and transparencies around fees as outlined in Bill 166.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The minister talked about the historic investment in her comments.

My question is, given the underfunding of our colleges and universities, how does she expect staff and faculty at

our colleges and universities to respond to concerns about student mental health and anti-hate and to implement these policies that the minister is going to dictate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Sattler, and I—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, unfortunately, that's the end of the time for this round.

MPP Clancy, you have got the remaining five minutes for questions.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I would like to raise that again. I know that there were some earmarked dollars for mental health. I do agree that more needs to happen, but I didn't see the funding that was allocated to follow through on the staffing and capacity-building that needs to happen to ensure that the anti-hate directive is effective. Can you speak to that? Why is there no dollars for that?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Clancy. That's an important part; I think I was actually asked that question during my lead-off debate time. This is something that schools should have already been doing. We want to ensure that when students are on campus, it is a safe learning environment. So having a policy in place is something that schools should have been doing already. Having this policy in place, ensuring that schools are safe, respectful learning environments, is a priority. It's what we heard from students and from faculty members alike who were talking about incidents and not having a reporting mechanism in place; there was never a follow-up. I'm sure the number of incidents are probably higher than what's actually reported because students aren't reporting it. They're saying, "What's the point in doing this if there's never any follow-up? I could have graduated and found out years later."

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is about the dollars, though. As someone who was hired full-time to do that work in our elementary and secondary schools, you need people to do those things and you need to pay them. So where is the funding to make sure that that happens? A policy is great on paper, but we know that websites cost money, staff to answer the phone costs money, workers to investigate a threat or a hate incident costs money. So can I ask why that's missing?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank for the question. We've constantly increased the mental health supports on campus because we recognize the need. I've mentioned being a mom. I've seen from my own children being in the classroom, I've seen from students the mental health pressures, the stress of being in school, the stress of balancing everything while you're going to school.

We continue to see an increase in mental health specifically in post-secondary, but the mental health supports that we see from the Ministry of Health as well in our communities. I know, speaking with MPP Coe, he has often mentioned the importance of our institutions collaborating with the community resources that are already offered so that students, when they return home in the summer, often have those supports locally as well.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: That would be helpful because I know we're needing more in the community to address incidents of hate.

The colleges brought up that we come in last place in terms of funding per student—that we were only 44% per student, in contrast to the average of the rest of the Canadian provinces, so 44% of the national average. We know that these lead to higher ratios—and colleges are spending a lot of money and universities are spending a lot of money already on student services.

My follow-up question, I guess, will have to do with the direction you're going by going around some of the governance in universities and colleges. The Council of Ontario Universities recommends that instead of a directive from the government—you know, we talk about respecting municipalities and letting them have their unique governance—that the direction should come through the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

May I ask why you've gone around the existing governance in universities to get involved? To me, that seems a bit of an overreach.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Clancy. That's a good question, because I have spoken with COU about their concerns on doing it through an OIC, but a directive will make it faster and more flexible. If we made a change and then needed to go back, we would have to go back again through legislation.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about one minute remaining in this round.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: And so, doing a directive rather than an OIC is just faster and flexible and more responsive to the needs of the school. So if we find that the directive that's in place is not necessarily matching what we were intending to and we're hearing that from institutions, then we can again change it and work with them and work faster to make those changes, rather than if it was through legislation and having to go through the work to change those.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Okay. Thank you.

That's all. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks, Minister, for appearing today. Thank you to the members. The committee will stand recessed until our hearings resume at 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1002 to 1300.

COLLEGES ONTARIO

MS. SUHAILA SALAH

ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT
ALLIANCE

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good afternoon, everyone. We will now resume with the consideration of public hearings on Bill 166.

I just want to say to the presenters: Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we've heard from all three presenters, in your case, the remaining 39 minutes will be reserved for questions from the members of the committee. In this round, the questions are going to be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition, followed by four and a half minutes for the independent member and then, finally, by seven and

a half minutes for the government members. As always, as I introduce you, state your name for the property of Hansard.

We're first going to hear from Marketa Evans, president and chief executive officer of Colleges Ontario. The floor is yours.

Ms. Marketa Evans: Good afternoon, distinguished members of this standing committee and my fellow witnesses. Thank you for inviting me to join you today.

As the president and CEO of Colleges Ontario, I'm appearing before you to represent the perspectives of Ontario's 24 public colleges.

Colleges Ontario did provide a written submission on Bill 166, so today, I'm going to focus on providing a little bit of additional context and answering your questions.

Bill 166 does increase the expectations on public colleges and public universities to report on student mental health policies, anti-hate initiatives and ancillary fees for students. We at Colleges Ontario appreciate the positive intent of these measures.

Alongside the introduction of this legislation, the province announced \$1.3 billion over three years for public colleges and universities as part of a stabilization effort. This investment was a welcome first step. We do expect more action from the province to ensure that the talent pipeline for college graduates can remain open in the years ahead. We expect further action because Ontario's current investment in public college students remains the lowest in the country, even as public college grads remain the backbone of our economy in Ontario. This financial situation does directly impact on the public colleges' ability to effectively implement the intent of Bill 166.

You may not be aware, but, for Ontarians, the average domestic diploma tuition is the second-lowest in Canada, at \$2,700 per year per full-time student. Ontario invests approximately \$6,900 per year in each public college student, which is the lowest rate in Canada. Ontario invests approximately \$11,500 per year in each university student. That means Ontario's public college students receive only about half of the public investment that Ontario university students receive.

The tuition cut in 2019 by about 10% has been maintained ever since. We appreciate and we understand the cost-of-living crisis that Ontarians are experiencing. At the same time, it's important to note that with the additional recently announced extension of this tuition freeze for another three years, this cut will be close to about 30% by 2026-27, so the financial environment at Ontario public colleges is constrained. Our colleges continue to put students first, and we have impressive outcomes.

On its face, our view is that this legislation is asking public colleges to do more. With this context, the proposed amendments outlined in Bill 166 require some additional detailed consideration, and we highlight that college student demographics are in fact quite different from those of our university counterparts. About 70% of our students do not come directly from high school and, outside of the greater Toronto area, 60% of students come from their local community, which means they commute.

On the first proposed amendment, reporting on mental health policies, Bill 166 proposes that every college be

required to have and report on a mental health policy. We agree that addressing student mental health requires urgent attention; indeed, our colleges have been leaders on this issue for many years.

Mental health conditions affect a significant proportion of our population, with Indigenous youth, for example, being disproportionately impacted, and international students having unique considerations. Colleges Ontario itself has been a leader of this issue and has worked with student organizations and the Council of Ontario Universities to co-author two In It Together reports that have resulted in many improvements, including a comprehensive, accessible database of community mental health services.

We will continue to work with the leaders, including the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, to develop and implement promising practices. We recommend, above all, that the government of Ontario continue to increase investments for student mental health supports.

The second amendment for Bill 166 proposes that every college will be required to have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate. Combatting racism, homophobia and transphobia is paramount in creating safe and welcoming campus environments, and we're dedicated to creating an environment where everyone feels where everyone feels valued.

We already have human rights policies and codes of conduct for students that address issues of racism and hate on campus, and many of these have been developed in collaboration with the communities that they're intended to support. So we fully support the government's efforts here, and we urge the government to ensure that directives from this legislation do not supersede local policy decisions already developed in collaboration with affected communities.

Finally, on the third amendment for ancillary fee reporting, the legislation proposes that colleges share information about the cost of attendance, including ancillary fees and textbook costs. Colleges Ontario understands the government's intent here and we support transparency in ancillary fees and education costs to ensure students don't face unanticipated—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have about one minute remaining.

Ms. Marketa Evans: We proactively develop low-cost, open education resources, and we continue to support cost transparency to support student success. For many college students, these ancillary fees are not necessarily textbook costs, but rather equipment they can use throughout their careers—a chef's knife, personal protective equipment or animation software, for example. We fully support the legislation's intent to provide more transparency.

And finally, we encourage collaborative engagement between the government and the college sector to address these issues, and we share the government's goal of fostering support of learning environments.

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks very much. I apologize for the legislative—

Mr. Deepak Anand: Music.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Percussion.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Yes, the legislative music because of the radiator. I appreciate you dealing with that.

Our second presenter is going to be joining the committee virtually. Suhaila Salah will be next to present. Again, you've got seven minutes. You can please state your name for Hansard, and you can begin.

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Good afternoon. My name is Suhaila Salah. I'm the co-founder of Sporas, a non-profit, volunteer-led organization that aims to empower youth to celebrate and embrace Palestinian cultural heritage with dignity and pride freely within their communities. We strive to uplift Palestinian youth within the diaspora to be proud of their identity and cultural roots, as this is the direct element that encourages active and positive civic engagement.

For the past six months, I and many others in my field of work have been extensively working with secondary and post-secondary students who have been subjected to increased censorship, surveillance and, at times, harassment from their school administrators, peers and teachers.

Racism is a structural determinant of health and its presence or absence shapes other social determinants of health, such as economic status and access to education. Racism is consistently associated with increased mental health conditions like depression, anxiety and psychological stress. There's also evidence that suggests that individuals and communities affected by structural and individual racism are at a disadvantage and face poorer health outcomes in general, not just mental health.

From my experience and the testimonials of students and faculty, receiving support from culturally responsive, trained mental health experts is far more impactful to ensure equitable and fair mental health support, rather than ministerial interference.

The minister has emphasized holding individuals accountable for acts of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. However, we don't see anti-Palestinian racism prioritized in the bill. Anti-Palestinian racism is different than Islamophobia, and critiquing a government does not make you anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism is not something to take lightly or to be weaponized. Sporas has been putting in extra effort to provide support for students from various backgrounds and ethnicities due to the lack of recognition and validation they receive from their institutions.

1310

Organizations such as the non-Zionist group Independent Jewish Voices have experienced significant backlash on campuses for voicing critiques on the violent actions of the state of Israel. Members have been subjected to harassment based on the false premises of the IHRA definition that anti-Zionist positions are inherently anti-Semitic, and therefore, anyone who voices an opinion is being called a self-hating Jew or, at worst, someone who wishes violence against the Jewish communities.

In summer of 2023, a York teacher lost their autonomy of their classroom, and grade 10 students were denied their right to freedom of speech whereby the minister banned school boards from showcasing the grade 10 students' video blog submission as part of their careers and civics

class. The video was reviewed by multiple stakeholders and reported to not include or incite any sort of violence or hate; rather, it was a video that shared facts on calling for peace and justice. The outcome of passing this bill will give power to the minister rather than the experts in the field of mental health.

We've witnessed a surge in support for our peers affected by the Ukraine-Russian war, with improved access to culturally responsive mental health supports. On the other hand, students whose homes and communities have been decimated by Israeli airstrikes are not even afforded or granted extensions on their exams or assignments and receive little sympathy from their professors and academic leadership.

A student disclosed to me that they tried to approach their school social worker for mental health support to share their feelings as a Palestinian living in the diaspora and seeing civilians murdered in the tens of thousands. But as a response, the social worker continued to persuade the student to change their political beliefs rather than offering mental health support.

Students and staff are under extreme scrutiny for sharing pro-Palestinian views, are faced with hate and are threatened with disciplinary consequences for calling out the Israeli government's war crimes. We have documented reports of students and faculty being suspended and even fired for a simple social media post. Bill 166 merely validates these practices of institutional discrimination, which is an infringement of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects students' rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association.

We observe a concerning trend of excessive control and intensive surveillance of security measures targeting Palestinian clubs and events on university campuses. The primary goal of these students is to utilize the safe environment provided by their academic institutions to exercise their democratic rights, their freedom of expression and to participate in a constructive dialogue aimed at forming a comprehensive and progressive world view. Bill 166 will damage the pivotal centre of these academic institutions.

While listening to the extensive upcoming rosters of speakers today and tomorrow, one might easily perceive the situation as an intractable conflict or some rampant hostility on campus. However, the reality is quite the opposite. From my experience, I can share that there exists significant collaboration and growth driven by the students themselves. Supported by their academic institutions, they do not need ministerial directives. If the ministry generally seeks to hold these institutions accountable, it should allocate resources to personnel trained in culturally responsive interventions. This would safeguard the autonomy of these institutions while ensuring equitable opportunities for all students.

Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you for your presentation.

Failure of sound system.

Ms. Vivian Chiem: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon. I want to thank the committee for your time and consideration of OUSA's feedback for Bill 166.

My name is Vivian, and I am the president of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, or OUSA for short, and joining me in person is our executive director, Malika.

OUSA is a policy advocacy group that represents the interests of over 160,000 undergraduate, professional, full-time and part-time students in the province. We have nine institutions that are part of our organization through their student association, and our mission is to strive for a post-secondary education system in Ontario that is affordable, accessible, high-quality and accountable for students.

Overall, OUSA is pleased with the intentions of Bill 166. It aims to increase cost transparency and formalize institutional policies on mental health and racism. However, we believe there are a few modifications that can be made to better consider our student needs.

Ms. Malika Dhanani: Good afternoon. My name is Malika Dhanani—for the purposes of the Hansard, I'm just restating my name.

First, OUSA would like to see more clarity throughout the bill that prevents institutional funding from being withheld if they are noncompliant with the minister's directive. Post-secondary institutions are facing significant financial crises, and while the Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund is one step to addressing this concern, there is still a long way to go to ensure that they can stay afloat. If this bill provides an avenue for funding to be clawed back from institutions because they do not comply with a minister's directive, it would be a financially punitive measure that further jeopardizes students' access to services and an institution's ability to provide them. Instead, alternative options for recourse, like a supportive and external body to address the minister's directive, should be explored.

Ms. Vivian Chiem: Next, we recommend, under section (6)(b) of the mental health policy, institutions should be required to review their policies once every two years instead of once every five years. Student mental health needs change rapidly with the evolving socio-political and economic climate. The policies that oversee mental health care provision and delivery need to adapt to these changes so that institutions develop approaches to mental health care that adequately address student concerns. If these policies are reviewed every five years, as proposed in the current draft of the bill, institutions risk having outdated frameworks that do not sufficiently target student needs, affecting their quality and the availability of services for students who may be in a crisis. It is critical that institutions review their policies in a more timely manner so that relevant updates can be made to address mental health concerns as they emerge.

OUSA's third recommendation for the bill, under the section on racism and hate, is to include the establishment of a provincial advisory committee comprised of racialized and religious students, faculty, staff, administrators and community leaders. The development of institutional policies would be stronger and more reflective of student needs if leaders with lived experience in these identities provided advisement and insights on these policies. Students value having a community approach to institutional policy development and this provincial advisory committee would help craft more meaningful policies that combat racism

and hate on campus. Without this committee, institutions would lack the intersectional lens that is needed and necessary for holistic and equitable policy.

Next, OUSA would like to see extra language added under section (5)(a) of racism and hate to ensure that any directive by the minister does not inadvertently discriminate against marginalized groups. As it is written, we are concerned that the clause is not restrictive enough and could lead to directives that have repercussions for marginalized groups, further perpetuating discrimination and inequitable access to education. It is especially true if said directives are not developed from adequate consultations from diverse community groups. OUSA would like to see language be added which enforces that any directive issued by the minister does not violate freedom from discrimination based on grounds protected by the OHRC.

Ms. Malika Dhanani: OUSA's next recommendation for Bill 166 is to [*inaudible*] and interventions that are meant to address racism and hate cannot be comprehensively shaped without up-to-date evidence about the issue. The prevalence and scope of racism and hate on campuses is unique to each institution and, as such, each school needs to develop policies that are tailored to their needs.

However, without student surveys, institutions will not be aware of the specific issues that their student bodies are facing. In order to craft effective policies to combat racism and hate, it is essential that institutions gain a comprehensive and intersectional understanding of what students are going through and what they need from their school to feel safe and welcomed. Consulting with students every three years would provide institutions with community-informed insights on creating robust campus safety models, as well as ideas to allocate funding amongst student supports.

Lastly, OUSA is recommending that a clause be added under the racism and hate section of the bill to mandate trauma-informed anti-racism training for faculty, staff and students. While many institutions offer anti-racism training for their campus members, this training is not always mandatory to take, nor is it required on a cyclical basis.

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Having this training for all members of the campus community is an important step to fostering campus climates that are more culturally sensitive. They are also a proactive measure to mitigate discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards marginalized members of campus. It increases accountability for everyone to be respectful and anti-racist, and the addition of this clause to Bill 166 would enshrine this accountability into law.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about one minute remaining.

Ms. Malika Dhanani: An inherent part of combatting racism and hate, which is what this bill seeks to do through mandating institutional policies on it is to ensure everyone on campus is equipped with the knowledge to recognize their unconscious biases, think critically about the implications of their words and actions, and become a better ally to those facing discrimination and hate.

Overall, Bill 166 is a positive step toward supporting students at an institutional level through formal policies and

processes. OUSA is hopeful that with our aforementioned recommendations, this bill can be strengthened to integrate more equity and accountability into these anticipated policies, creating safer and more inclusive campuses for students.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move into the question section of the hearings. I'd like to call on the official opposition for the first seven and a half minutes. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to our three presenters for this first panel this afternoon.

I'd like to start with Colleges Ontario and talk a little bit about your comment that the bill increases the expectations for colleges to do more in terms of developing policy, implementing policy, reporting policy on student mental health, as well as anti-hate, in the context of a fiscal environment that has seriously constrained the ability of colleges even to deliver basic education.

You talked about the government's investment as a welcome first step. Do you feel that the expectations that this bill will create for colleges—that you will be able to deliver based on the funding that was announced alongside this bill?

Ms. Marketa Evans: Thank you very much for the question. I think much remains unknown about how the bill will play out in practice. I think what we were pointing out was really the additional reporting and administrative responsibilities that this bill creates, not so much about substantive things. I think on most of the substance, our members are already there.

But again, this remains a bit unknown, because we don't know exactly how this would be implemented on the ground and to what extent there would be duplication with things that are already in place. I think that's kind of what I was trying to refer to about how it creates additional expectations on the reporting side, at minimum.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: You also highlighted the collaborative engagement that is already well embedded in the sector and the work that has been done in collaboration with CSA, OUSA and COU on the In It Together report. Do you have concerns about the provisions of this bill to enable ministerial directives in terms of the content of these policies, as well as exempting the ministerial directives from any transparency under the Legislation Act? Is this in the spirit of the collaborative engagement that you already have on campus, when you have the minister dictating what's supposed to be in the content of the mental health policy, the anti-hate policy and the financial cost policy?

Ms. Marketa Evans: Again, I think there are going to be implementation issues that need to be worked out. It is not clear to me, at least, that any new policies on mental health will actually be required. What I'm seeing here is the need for all colleges—public colleges, I underscore—to have a mental health policy. I feel confident that that will not be a high threshold. That exists already. I don't know what additional directives there would be about the content of any of those policies.

We work, as you noted, in collaboration with the university sector, with our student supports. I do want to underscore the importance of community-based mental health supports. For college students, because many of them are

local and many of them stay on campus for a much shorter period of time than at university, the importance of that continuum in the community is really critical. We're really looking at that whole ecosystem to ensure that people get support on campus, but that it doesn't just end when they graduate or go back into the community to work.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much.

I now want to move to Suhaila and basically the same question that I just asked of Colleges Ontario: You concluded your remarks by noting the significant collaboration that already exists on campuses, and you raised concerns about the power that this bill gives to the minister to dictate the content of the student mental health policy, the anti-hate policy. And you also pointed out the critical need for any mental health supports to be culturally responsive, and similarly the anti-hate provisions to be sensitive to the lived realities of students. I wanted to ask you if you could elaborate a little bit more about your concerns in terms of this bill giving such power to the minister to dictate the contents of these policies.

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Definitely. I can speak mostly to the experience that I've had with students, and what we know and what is documented as what were the minister's actions recently. I think what I was referring to was the minister calling out UTM students recently, as well as faculty, which put them in harm's way. When we're talking about creating a safe space for students, when we're talking about ensuring that everyone has access to equitable mental health support that is culturally responsive, we essentially are referring to the experts that have the most knowledge in this area of expertise.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about a minute left in this round.

Ms. Suhaila Salah: In order to achieve that, it's important that we already have—as the speaker before me has mentioned, there are procedures and there is infrastructure put in place. It requires ministerial support rather than the intervention in order to ensure that the students are receiving equitable and non-biased supports and mental health supports from the respective expertise.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you very much.

And quickly for OUSA: You talked about the provincial advisory committee engaging faculty and staff, students, experts, communities. The provisions that are set out in this bill about the development of the policies through ministerial directive—do you feel that that is the best way to develop policy on post-secondary—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll have to hold that question until the next round. We're out of time this round.

We'll now ask the independent member. You have four minutes, 30 seconds for your round of questioning. You may begin.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My first question is for Suhaila: Can you share a little bit about what amendments you would like to see in Bill 166 that would assure you that anti-Palestinian racism and other kinds of hate would be well-defined to ensure that there was consistency and some safety?

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Yes. Definitely defining and recognizing anti-Palestinian racism in the bill will make a

significant difference in making sure that all students are being recognized for the experiences and the incidents that they would be facing, and also to provide support for the infrastructure to respond appropriately to those specific instances. As OUSA was mentioning as well, there is training that is put in place; however, this training is not mandatory. So this would also greatly impact and benefit such supports to make a true and long-lasting support and safe space for all students.

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As I've said before, when we talk about anti-racism and policy, it's not only to the Palestinian diaspora. This has been affecting all students from various racial backgrounds, including our Jewish colleagues that have certain opinions against the state of Israel.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

And maybe for Colleges Ontario: I know anti-hate policy is one thing, but without the dollars to action the supports and data collection etc. needed—can you tell me what investments are needed to make sure that these policies can be fully realized?

Ms. Marketa Evans: I think that this kind of rolls into all of the ancillary supports that public colleges provide to students, right? I think this kind of goes into that basket of discretionary support and dollars that are not necessarily covered in the current situation by either tuition, which remains very affordable and accessible for Ontarians, or operating grants. The intent of those funds is, of course, to continue to fund the core mission of the college, which is the education and training in the post-secondary space.

I think what I was trying to point out is that the responsibilities of the public college sector have grown over the past many years to include things like mental health supports for students; ensuring safe space on campus, across the whole swath of safety and security; housing; and ensuring that students have access to all the supports that they need to thrive as students. That has opened up pretty significant gaps in the current business model.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'll just ask the same—if you could share more about this committee. Because I agree: It would be nice to have confidence that any directive coming from the government was a partnership with many stakeholders.

Ms. Malika Dhanani: Yes. Maybe I'll take this question. Basically, what we are trying to see with this recommendation is a provincially based advisory committee that's comprised of racialized and religious members of all—like, the entire campus community. That's a way to really get genuine and authentic insights about the lived experiences of these communities into policy development.

I think, ideally, the development of this bill could have also benefited from a provincial-based advisory committee of the sort. But going forward, I think the policies that can be developed at institutions would benefit greatly by having people who have that lived experience and those lived identities intersectionally in the development of these policies on campuses.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay, that's the time.

We'll now move to the government's first round of questioning. Seven and a half minutes, MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for your presentations today—much appreciated.

My questions are for Marketa from Colleges Ontario. Again, thank you for being here today and thank you for providing a written submission. I have a background working in the college sector and agree that the colleges do a very good job at collaborating, sharing resources, sharing best practices.

My questions for you are—I guess the first one: As many of the committee members here today and MPP colleagues from across the province will tell you, we've been inundated with letters from constituents who are concerned about the spike in hate in Ontario's post-secondary institutions. I'm just wondering if you can comment about what's happening at Ontario colleges and if you can tell us whether you support the language in this bill and some of the ways that you anticipate that this will help to fight hate on college and university campuses.

Ms. Marketa Evans: What's happening on college campuses is, I think, representative of what has been happening across the broader community, although I think it has been somewhat more muted than what we've seen play out, perhaps, in American jurisdictions and so on. But I wouldn't want to diminish in any way the reality of the way people are feeling on campus.

Our programs are quite different, as I said. A lot of people come to us not straight from high school. They tend to be very motivated by the job outcome, so they come to a college for one, two or three years very focused on the job outcome at the end. The programs tend to be much more hands-on and technical. I think all of that plays into what we're seeing on college campuses, but it's not to suggest that college campuses are immune to what has been happening in broader society.

We believe that it's really important for everyone to do everything they can to make sure campuses remain a safe space—safe and inclusive for everyone across the board. That includes groups that face traditional barriers to post-secondary education and it includes making sure that we have supports in place to ensure that they can succeed. Many of our students are first generation. Many of our students are coming from newcomer communities, Indigenous communities, and that's the kind of support that is really critical to make sure that those campuses remain an inclusive and welcoming place to study.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you for that. In addition to groups who face barriers, we also have to think about safe campuses for visitors, for faculty, for employees and for families who may be visiting with their children who are away at college.

I'm just curious, what more can our colleges be doing to ensure that they're safe and respectful environments that are conducive to education and student success?

Ms. Marketa Evans: I think every college would answer that slightly differently depending on what their student demographic is, what their current situation looks like, but there's always more we can do. I think all of our members are really committed to doing everything that they can.

One of the features of a collaborative system like the college system is we are constantly sharing good practice and best practice, making sure that we're all aware of what's going on, what other people are doing, what has happened on one particular campus. How do we make sure that we're learning from that across the board? Our commitment to that is very, very strong. As I said, that includes many different groups who may experience pressures or may face barriers to having a really successful post-secondary experience.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: This question is for the Ontario university students alliance. As a parent paying student fees for my post-secondary child, I think generating more transparency for student fees is a great idea. Students and their families deserve to know where their tuition dollars are going, and you, as representatives of students, do you support greater transparency in how institutions spend tuition dollars and what new fees will be going towards? And what type and what level of transparency are you looking for?

Ms. Malika Dhanani: Vivian, do you want to take this one?

Ms. Vivian Chiem: Yes. I guess just the ancillary fees and textbook fees—a lot of times when you enter a university, they don't tell you additional stuff besides your tuition money. Then when you go to class the first day, they're like, "Hey, you have to buy a \$300 textbook," and you have no idea; you did not budget for the \$300 textbook or learning materials or lab coats or any other necessary items that you need for your courses.

I think it's just making it really clear from the start: When you register in this course, this is what you will be paying in addition to your tuition that you're already paying. That will help students budget better, given that we are in an affordability crisis. Tuition is obviously really high still, and students are also trying to budget for their food, their housing and other living expenses. I think that's just a really simple thing that they can do, is just—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute remaining.

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Ms. Vivian Chiem: Yes. So that's the main thing they can do, is just let them know, "Besides your tuition, this is what you'll also be paying for." That will help, again, let students budget better.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: There's not too much time left in this round, but my question in the next round will be for the Ontario university students alliance. For me, it wasn't too, too long ago that I was a university student myself, and when you say "textbooks," I'm kind of shocked, because these days everything is online and I know that students operate in the online space.

My question in the next round, because I want to give it the proper time it deserves, will be around mental health supports on campus. But thank you for your presence here today and for all the advocacy work you do on behalf of

the 160,000 students. It's really important that those voices are heard.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay. We're closing off this round and we'll move to the second round of questioning. This is again to the official opposition—seven and a half minutes. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wanted to direct this question to OUSA, and it is related to the difference between the policies that are set out in this bill versus previous policies that were mandated by the government. As you know, there was the policy on sexual violence and harassment, there was the policy on free speech on campus, and I understand that institutions who developed those policies engaged with their local communities. There was extensive engagement on campuses with staff and students and faculty.

Do you have concerns about the way that this bill gives the power to the minister to determine the content of these policies, versus having the policies developed through consultation on campus?

Ms. Malika Dhanani: That's a great question. Thank you. I think that's where some of our recommendations in terms of having data collection come through, and having that student consultation piece every three years comes through. Again, ideally, the development of this bill would have been beneficial by having had those community-based consultations beforehand, before it got tabled.

But I think that in terms of the minister's directive and what that would look like in developing institutional policies, for us, we see a big piece being those consultations with community members, and I think the more that we can integrate consultations into this bill and mandate the recurring collection of consultations every three years, it would be helpful to make sure that whatever directives the minister does put forward through this bill are informed by lived experiences and by those insights from people who are directly experiencing the implications of these different policies—so students, faculty and staff.

Viv, did you want to add anything?

Ms. Vivian Chiem: No, I think you covered that.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay, but currently, the legislation doesn't make any reference to any kind of consultation taking place in the development of these policies.

I also wanted to ask about the financial situation that universities are in. You noted that almost half of Ontario universities are currently facing deficits. We know that what the government came forward with was half of what the blue-ribbon panel had recommended was needed in ongoing, permanent base funding. The government came forward with some three-year limited funding.

I have heard from post-secondary students about the feeling that they don't have access to enough mental health supports on campus. I just wondered if you are hearing from students who may be concerned that the post-secondary institutions won't be able to deliver increased mental health supports, won't be able to follow through in appropriate ways on disclosures of incidents of hate on campus because of the fiscal pressures that our institutions are facing.

Ms. Malika Dhanani: Viv, do you want to take that?

Ms. Vivian Chiem: Yes, of course. Yes, we've definitely heard from students that they are worried that finding

efficiencies, for lack of a better word, will mean cutting services or not providing those services to students. Right now, I think COVID-19 is a great example, showing how student mental health needs are rapidly changing, and even coming out of a post-pandemic world, understanding there's compounding stress to complete your education with the high cost of living, the lack of financial support right now.

We actually run a biannual survey, our Ontario undergraduate student survey. In 2022, 43% of students expressed that their mental health has not improved and, rather, worsened. In 2020, even, 80% of students experienced loneliness and isolation during completing their undergraduate degree. Those are really high numbers and that is really worrisome.

We want to make sure that we can give the timely, adequate, trauma-informed, culturally relevant supports. Something that we've advocated a lot this year is the racial equity focus as well, ensuring that we have those who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+, to reflect the diverse populations as well, so if there are supports, it's reflective of the student needs and the student population as well. It's not just mental health, but very specific mental health supports as well.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you for that.

I want to go back to Suhaila on the issue of culturally responsive mental health supports being the most effective and the most, I think, lacking at many of our institutions. Can you tell us a little bit more about why culturally responsive mental health supports are so essential for students, and do you have concerns about whether this bill will enable the development and delivery of culturally responsive mental health supports?

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Definitely. To answer your first question, I think just referring to what the OHRC, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, has stated and has shared with us that having cultural intervention from—as OUSA has said, that having participatory and culturally responsive influences and experts involved in these mental health supports gives a higher impact. When we have, let's say, the ministerial or this bill being enacted, we are jeopardizing the impact, or we're reverting the focus on who can actually provide these mental health supports rather than ensuring that the involved parties and stakeholders are addressing the issues—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about one minute remaining.

Ms. Suhaila Salah: —of their communities. So similar to how OUSA was speaking before, that having participatory cultural response defines the specific needs of each community and would give them the appropriate response and support that they require.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay, thank you very much. How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thirty-five seconds.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. For Colleges Ontario, you mentioned that the new directives must not supersede what is already in place and talked about anti-hate and student mental health policies already existing. How would you suggest that the government do that, ensure that the directives don't supersede what's in place?

Ms. Marketa Evans: Because I probably have 10 seconds left, I'll echo what Malika said earlier. We encourage consultations to find out what's already happening on the ground.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): All right. We'll now move to the independent member. MPP Clancy, you'll have four and a half minutes for your final round of questions with this group.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: As a school social worker, what I've noticed in the community, and I think this is probably what is echoing on campuses, is that because there's such a big demand for services—and maybe it becomes harder and harder to keep and retain staff, let alone hire new staff—it undermines the ability to provide this kind of service. I know, in my community, a lot of really specialized, expert clinicians have left because of changes being made, and students can maybe only get seen once a month or once every three weeks, which for someone in a mental health crisis, we know, is inadequate, like you're just putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg. I'll say, I think that's the experience in the mental health sector right now in community.

Maybe I'll ask Colleges Ontario and then maybe OUSA to respond to how the stretching of an elastic band that's already so tight is affecting service delivery.

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Ms. Marketa Evans: I can't speak to what's happening on each specific campus. I think that needs to be left to each specific campus to answer. What I would say is one size can't fit all. We know that many students now are much more comfortable accessing mental health supports virtually, online, as much as, or even more than, going in person. We know that there are lots of different avenues to reach young people that may not have been the traditional model of care even a number of years ago.

I think what we're encouraging is more collaboration between campus and community mental health supports, understanding that certain things are better done in the community. That will also ensure that that student will get the support that they need, whether or not they continue as a student on campus, when they graduate and so on and so forth.

So, absolutely, we must take responsibility for what we can do to support students with mental health needs and many other needs as well, as I spoke about before. But that large demand in services, I think we need to have these kind of—and that's where, I think, the work of the collaborative has been really, really useful: to ensure that students can navigate across a variety of community-based supports, as well as what's available on campus, whether that is because of timeliness, specialized services or other needs that might be better met in community.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: But more funding would help?

Ms. Marketa Evans: Absolutely.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Okay.

Do you have anything to add?

Ms. Malika Dhanani: Yes, I think one thing that I would add to that question is the fact that, in terms of the

stretching of funding and how that's impacting students, what we've heard from students is that a lot of them are waiting months at a time to get access to mental health services on campus. Like we pointed to in our presentation earlier, this is not always in a timely manner to address crises that students are going through as it pertains to their mental health needs. And so I think one of the ways we're seeing the impacts of how stretched mental health services are on campuses is that it's impacting students in their access to mental health care in a way that doesn't serve them in the moment.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about one minute remaining.

Ms. Malika Dhanani: I think the other component to that as well is that we noticed that there is a lot of turnover at institutions with mental health staff and counsellors who are serving students, and this is because of that lack of funding, because there is not enough money to fund the counsellors who are there. When we've spoken to students and even administrators on campus, they've said that increased funding would help maintain the counsellors that they have on campus, which then increases the quality of service that students get because they have the same counsellor that they can go to and they have that continued rapport with the students.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

Suhaila, I just wonder if you could share one thought about why it's important for you to have a voice on campus and how every community deserves to have a space to share critical thinking but not hate.

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Definitely. I think when, just referring back to the OHRC and sharing the importance of visual representation and the Canadian mosaic, we're talking about culture as being a cornerstone of many of the identities of these individuals on campus—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): That concludes this round of questions.

I'll now move to the government's second round. MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: My question will be for OUSA. Thank you for stating that this bill is a positive step towards supporting students, and I couldn't agree more. When I reflect back on when I was just down the street at U of T as an undergraduate student walking around the campus, mental health was something that wasn't as much talked about as it is today. There was a certain level of stigma attached to even going out there and asking for support. I, myself, had some experiences where I did need that additional support and to be accommodated for certain exams. And so I was very grateful that, even back then, those supports existed.

Life happens. Students today wear many hats. Some of them might be single moms that are working multiple jobs. Many of the students are commuters. They have other family responsibilities; they might be taking care of an ill parent at home. We've seen, especially after the pandemic, the conversations about mental health on campus have become more centred, and that is true for our government as well.

But what we've also heard is that universities don't have a standardized way across all institutions for dealing with some of these mental health challenges.

Can you tell us a little bit about what your thoughts are about creating a standard of mental health supports at colleges and universities across the province that will benefit students, so there is one standard instead of different approaches to things like bereavement, mental health support, critical illness etc.?

Ms. Malika Dhanani: Viv, do you want to do this?

Ms. Vivian Chiem: Yes. Sorry, could you repeat your question? Just what can institutions do specifically—is that what you said? Or what the provincial government can do?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: The question is, do you think it would be beneficial for universities to have standardized protocols for how to approach mental health situations and give accommodations etc., so that, for example, if you have a bereavement situation in your family, you don't have to be questioned by a professor—that was an example given from a previous speaker—like that?

Ms. Vivian Chiem: Yes, I think there's a lot of room for the universities to do stuff like that. OUSA as an organization, we lobby specifically to the provincial government, so we can't give recommendations specifically for the university, but there's stuff that we've suggested where we can collaborate. For example, the provincial government should develop a series of best practices with the post-secondary institutions and the local health care providers to help triage them more appropriately. Those things can help to mediate their time. There are just other ways to go about it.

I think on a university level, as a Laurier student myself, I can say that there is room for the university to be more grief-literate and understand there's different types of needs. As you mentioned, there's different types of intersectionalities and lived experiences that we don't necessarily consider all the time when we talk about mental health and what that can look like and show up as.

Another suggestion that we have is for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to mandate that all institutions' mental health care workers receive different types of training to provide accessible, trauma-informed, culturally relevant counselling and stuff to just, again, address the needs of our student population. That's a way our universities can better show up: to continuously fund the mental health services on campus, to have representation and to make sure that they're working alongside different local health care providers to help mediate that.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you very much. That was a really great answer.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is to Suhaila Salah. Suhaila, I'm a son of a refugee, and I want to say thank you for what you're doing to uplift the Palestinian youth.

Speaking to my father, I know many times the challenges that he faced; probably I didn't face it. I came as an

immigrant from India, and I know my neighbour MPP Kusendova came as a Polish immigrant from Poland. But when we came here, to my surprise, I was not called Canadian, I was called Indo-Canadian, and my colleague was called Polish Canadian. But what was common was we were both Canadian. And I can't thank Canada enough. It allows all of us to come here.

Something which I want to say: Many of us come here for a better life, and many of us come here for a safer life. So when I was thinking about what I should ask as a question, I actually asked one of the members of the racialized community to send me a question. She's a student. I'm going to read out what she asked me to ask. She said: "As an organization who works in the space of human rights and civil liberties, how do you strike the balance between supporting free speech and ensuring that a Canadian participating in debates with another Canadian who may be from a different background feels safe and respected while ideas are challenged?" What would you like to say?

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Knowledge of what is hate; reading up on the OHCR; knowing what is hate speech; being involved in collaborative spaces where you are freely able to express your points of view, with the objective of restorative circles and restorative justice. We have seen this and we have experienced this in certain schools. Many organizations have been offering free services to people that have been experiencing mental health struggles from the conflict that has been happening around the world, and they have extensive records on how to address the specific needs with the students. We would expect or recommend, if this bill were to pass, that it would ensure that, through collaborative efforts, you implement best practices with collaboration with these experts.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about one minute remaining.

1400

Ms. Suhaila Salah: Knowing that this is a restorative space—and, as you were saying, as all Canadians, we live in a mosaic where we're intertwined with each other. We all share a certain background. We all share a certain pair of values, to respect human rights and uphold international law. So there's no one that is above the law, and it is not shameful to be holding these people accountable. Rather, it is creating a safe space for these progressive and positive dialogues on campuses and as well as off campuses.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much.

MPP Smith, do you want to go ahead?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about 15 seconds.

Interjection.

Ms. Laura Smith: I don't know how I'd do that.

You know, free speech is a very good thing, but there's a lack of consistency throughout the college and university campus system in reporting free speech—or, sorry, I should say hate—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, MPP Smith. That's the time we have for the 1 o'clock time slot.

I want to thank our presenters and obviously thank the committee members.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES
UNION
HILLEL ONTARIO
CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS—
ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): The 2 p.m. time slot: We've got a number of presenters that are joining us virtually.

The first presenter is the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. JP Hornick is the president. JP, do you want to begin, or does one of your colleagues want to begin? As always, before you speak, introduce yourself for the purposes of Hansard. You've got seven minutes. Each presenter has seven minutes, followed by the rotations between the three individuals around the committee.

Go ahead.

President JP Hornick: Yes, thank you very much. I'll be taking the full seven minutes.

Good afternoon. My name is JP Hornick. I'm president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, OPSEU/SEFPO. My pronouns are they and them.

I'm here with my colleagues from the colleges and universities sectors, Christine Kelsey, Kella Loschiavo and Jonathan Singer.

As a college professor, I have spent a great deal of my life on a campus, which are the spaces where we learn to think, grow, care for one another, which are all fundamental in how we move forward together as a province. But right now, we are facing the most devastating underfunding of post-secondary public education in decades.

Bill 166, the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, has been presented by this government as student-centric and focused on transparency, mental health support, anti-racism and anti-hate. I'm here because students in our post-secondary institutions do need support, but Bill 166 is not the support that they need.

At the heart of Ontario's post-secondary crisis is a chronic, multi-generational underfunding of post-secondary education and the refusal by government to focus on students by fixing the funding crisis.

When we underfund these institutions, students suffer. Take counsellors: Our public colleges have a well-documented counsellor staffing crisis, and it's only worsened over the last five years. Without adequate funding for more counsellors, it means long wait times for urgently needed mental health support. Our post-secondary institutions are supposed to equip students for a successful future, but a lack of support means that the students who need help most will struggle to complete their studies, meet academic expectations and keep themselves afloat.

Waiting weeks for a 20-minute appointment with a counsellor when you are at rock bottom is egregious and worsens the risk of untreated mental health struggles. The wait to meet with an assistive technologist, similarly, can stretch as long as six weeks. There are roadblocks to recruiting student success specialists, who play a pivotal

role as proactive, vital supports for students who are struggling to overcome barriers. Insufficient funding means an insufficient number of interventions for students who need support the most.

When it comes to student mental health, it's not a lack of policy that's the issue; it's a lack of staffing and resources because of chronic underfunding by the provincial government. When compared to the rest of Canada, Ontario is dead last among the provinces for per-student funding of colleges and universities.

Unfortunately, this government has not met its own panel's recommendations on providing financial support to the institutions. There is nearly \$1 billion in funding shortfalls, despite what's being touted as a historic investment.

Students and workers who are living through the funding crisis feel its consequences first-hand, so let me be clear: Our colleges and universities urgently need a sustainable increase to the annual base funding they receive from the ministry to ensure they are decent and, yes, supportive places to work and study. We need to do a better job of supporting young people who are struggling.

We see news stories of students living in deplorable conditions. Many of these students are international and racialized newcomers taken advantage of by predatory landlords. Students are juggling multiple jobs while struggling to afford food, rent, transportation and tuition costs, often having to choose which one they're going to need to sacrifice that month.

This government must focus on providing meaningful relief to students and their families in a cost-of-living crisis. Unfortunately, that's not what Bill 166 will do.

Instead, Bill 166 undermines the fundamental principles of post-secondary education. Even though every college and university is already required to have policies in place to address racism and hate on campus, this bill pushes for even greater government intervention in such policies and is a significant overreach. We are deeply concerned that this bill signals the government's intent to intervene and impose itself in the internal affairs of colleges and universities, and in a really dangerous way. This isn't about putting the students first. There are already laws, regulations and policies that concern speech in the public sphere. Government intervention will absolutely increase the threat of overreach by college and university administration or enforcement bodies. It is no place for governments of the day. It's a real risk. These policies should not be used to censor dissenting viewpoints, and governments should not play a hand in surveilling freedom of expression and dissent on our campuses, full stop. We've seen how these policies have been used in the past. In 2018, when the provincial government required all colleges and universities to develop so-called free speech policies, it was political theatre, pure and simple. University administrators were issued directives by the Minister of Colleges and Universities to silence dissent. This is not helpful.

Our campuses are supposed to be places where ideas are freely exchanged and debated, allowing principled ideas about the world to flourish. Subjectively defining and codifying what constitutes racism or hate has a chilling effect on discourse, potentially leading to the censorship of speech

that, while arguably controversial or offensive, is not necessarily hateful or racist. This move will create a growing environment of self-censorship, where students, staff and faculty may fear expressing opinions that challenge prevailing narratives or engaging in debates that involve contentious issues.

Our post-secondary institutions are in crisis and students are in crisis, and they do need support. But it's time to stop playing politics with our campuses and instead focus seriously on what really matters: providing sustainable funding solutions and protecting educational excellence.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about one minute remaining.

President JP Hornick: Thank you. I will cede the rest of my time.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

Our second presenter—we've got a number of people online; as well, one in person. I want to thank the CEO, Seth Goren, for being here.

Rabbi, you have your seven minutes.

Rabbi Seth Goren: Thank you, sir.

By way of introduction, I'm Rabbi Seth Goren. I serve as the CEO of Hillel Ontario, which is an organization that amplifies Jewish student life at nine universities across the province and serves 14,000 Jewish students.

I appreciate you, Mr. Clark, and the members of the committee taking the time to convene this hearing and to respond to a variety of concerns, including the growing menace of anti-Semitism at Ontario's universities and colleges. While anti-Semitism may not be new, either in the world or on campus, it is growing, and the threat to Jewish students is rising.

Anti-Semitism as a form of bigotry dates back thousands of years and has had grotesque, fatal consequences for millions of Jews over that time; because I only have seven minutes to speak, I won't be going to give you a complete, multi-millennial history this afternoon.

Instead, I want to focus on the campus situation prior to October 7 and how it has changed since then so that you better appreciate the way in which anti-Semitism on campus is a systemic and persistent problem, not merely a recent or superficial development.

As background, I have been engaged in Jewish campus and young adult work for nearly two decades—long enough to notice trends, see anti-Semitism's ebbs and flows, and cultivate an understanding of what works and what doesn't in prevention and reduction. I practised human rights law prior to attending seminary, have taught university academic courses, and have led other, more informal instruction on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as interfaith dialogue. These experiences have provided me with a detailed array of specific, often painful incidents of campus anti-Semitism, a higher-level overview of general concepts, and everything in between.

1410

As I mentioned earlier, campus anti-Semitism is not new. Some pre-October 7 lowlights from the nine campuses Hillel Ontario serves:

As background, from the 1960s and earlier, even before students could arrive on campus, quotas on the number of

admitted Jewish students were historically pervasive for decades. Standards for Jews were higher than for other applicants as a whole, and many Jews never had the chance to earn university degrees, because they were rejected and blocked from matriculating.

More recently, in 2009, Jewish students at York were chased into the Hillel space in the student centre by peers chanting, "Die, Jew. Get the hell off campus" and similar phrases, banging on the Hillel door and windows. Afraid for their safety and on the advice of university security, Jewish students remained at Hillel until a police escort arrived an hour later to evacuate them.

A similar incident took place in the fall of 2019, instilling an ongoing sense of fear in many Jewish students, even if they were not enrolled at the time.

In 2015, a TMU social work student was told she could not complete a placement at two major Jewish community organizations because "some of their values seem to be in opposition to the values of the school."

In her watershed 2022 article, Dr. Ayelet Kuper detailed the legacy of anti-Semitism at the Temerty Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto and presented harrowing examples of how this bigotry continues to play out today. She chronicled everything from a colleague's position that "those Jews who think their Holocaust means they know something about oppression" to testimonies about non-Jewish students who believed in the power of Jews to finagle or obstruct residency matches.

These are some top-line examples, but they barely scratch the surface. Indeed, Jews on campus bear scars from regular and all-too-frequent abrasions associated not just with major run-ins but also with casual microaggressions and lower-grade anti-Semitism, relatively speaking: the graffiti, the insinuations of hidden Jewish power, the implied connections between Jews and wealth, the dismissals of Jewish adversity or pain. Delivered via peers' social media accounts, professional asides in class, off-hand comments in interpersonal interactions or printed media around campus, these barbs may seem minimal or superficial individually, but each subsequent one cuts deeper and deeper, aggregating into profound and upsetting emotional and psychological gouges that leave us on edge and uncertain, angry and fearful.

There is no doubt this is getting worse. Hillel Ontario has received nine times more incident reports this academic year than in 2022-23. Others can share their direct experiences and provide concrete examples against this landscape of growing hate, but among the additional post-October 7th illustrations reported to us:

Mezuzoth, Jewish ritual items attached to external doorposts have been torn off Jewish students' rooms and residence halls and smashed, pieces strewn down the corridor.

Two Jewish students wearing kippot, traditional head coverings, in public were swarmed, accosted and screamed at. Those confronting them threw objects at them before wishing them death. A student who hosted a Jewish event had rocks thrown through their windows in the middle of the night, shattering both the glass and their sense of security.

We have observed an increase in both the intensity and the frequency of occurrences, an increase that shows little

signs of abating. Consequently, Jewish families are discussing extraordinary measures, including taking on debt to send their children out of province or out of the country to places where they'll feel and be safer. As an immigrant to Canada and relatively newly minted citizen, it is painful to hear that the country that has by and large offered me a warm and enthusiastic welcome is becoming a place where fellow members of the Jewish community are isolated, anxious or worse.

I could continue with these comments and examples, but the bottom line is this: Anti-Semitism has been around for a long, long time. Anti-Semitism on campus has been around for a while.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute remaining.

Rabbi Seth Goren: And they're both getting worse, in both the frequency of their appearance and the intensity of their manifestations. Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

Our final two presenters are online. They're from the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario. Mitra and Adaeze, one of you can begin. Just make sure you introduce yourself for the purposes of Hansard. You can proceed.

Can you hear me okay?

Ms. Adaeze Mbalaja: I was unable to unmute myself. Hi, folks. My name is Adaeze, she/her pronouns, and I am the national executive representative at the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario, representing over 200,000 students provincially. I'm joined by Mitra Yakubi, the chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario. We're here today, as folks have already identified, to talk about the bill and to be able to provide consultation.

I think the first thing that I do want to speak to is the directive regarding costs. It is the position of the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario and the position of students all across the province that education fundamentally is incredibly costly and one of the biggest barriers to access. Of course, there are many other barriers, as folks have identified, like the mental health issues on campus, like the ability to engage, given identities and all of these other aspects, but first and foremost, one of the main reasons students are unable to access education in its entirety and in a myriad of ways is due to the cost.

When we look to the directive of costs, the directives as they are in this bill remain unclear. What parameters would cause an institution to be transparent? What does transparency look like in the current system of education that exists, where funding has not been consistent? What would the transparency for international students look like as well, given that, as of now, there is no regulation for international student tuition fees? Some of the most marginalized students on our campuses, financially and in other ways, are unable to engage due to the fact that, financially, there was no consistency or transparency for their tuition fees.

On a grand scale, via the minister and via the government, what would transparency look like for institutions and, most importantly, for students, when we know that financial inaccessibility is one of the main reasons students are unable to access post-secondary education?

I'll pass it over to Mitra.

Ms. Mitra Yakubi: The next aspect of the bill that we'd like to speak to is the consultation process. We recognize that consultation plays a vital role in the development of a policy. It is through consultation that community members can express their concerns about the effects of a policy, offer ideas on how to make the policy better and share experiences that illuminate what a policy should do. Consultation can ensure that a policy works for the community and not the other way around.

We are all here today because we believe to some extent in the importance of that consultation. That is why students today are dismayed and concerned that Bill 166 makes no reference to a consultation process regarding the mental health and anti-discrimination policies it requires and mandates post-secondary institutions to implement. The bill indicates that all institutions must have these policies, but fails to insist that students, faculty and staff be consulted on their development. This means that institutions will create and implement these policies without input from student bodies as to their content or effect. It is our concern that this bill fails to adequately meet the needs of students they are meant to serve.

Students, as well as faculty and staff, must be consulted on the development of all and every institutional policy, as they are the greatest stakeholders and most likely to be affected by them. The federation insists that any directives regarding the content of these policies must be made in consultation with students. Without this, Bill 166 is inadequate and fails its supposed aim of improving student life.

Lastly, we share and echo the concerns that have been expressed widely by faculty and staff across our post-secondary institutions. We reject government interference in our post-secondary institutions. Government interference in our post-secondary institutions jeopardizes academic freedom, and that is essential for critical research in mental health and anti-racism. This bill overlooks decades of research and best practices that have been established by students, staff, faculty and community members who are members of our campus communities, who are the experts of their own lived experiences.

We instead urge the government to increase funding for post-secondary education, which has been impacted by decades of chronic underfunding. This increase in funding can allow an investment in culturally responsive mental health support services and vital support centres, such as sexual violence centres and equity support offices that are currently struggling due to understaffing and underfunding.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you for your presentation.

We'll move to the question portion. We'll start with the independent member. MPP Clancy, you have four and a half minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My first question is for OPSEU, for JP. I wonder if you can speak a little bit about your worry in terms of overreach and lack of funding. I think it's important that we understand the impact. Maybe you could start with funding. I don't know if you've seen

overreach and you could speak to the impact of that, but I think it's important for us to not just talk about numbers and not just talk about policy, but to understand the impact that that has for those working and living on campus.

President JP Hornick: Yes, sure. I appreciate that question. When we're actually looking at the notion of overreach, any government that then gets to issue directives about what counts as racism and what doesn't, what counts as support and what doesn't, is actually interfering with the basic fundamental responsibility of colleges and universities themselves, of the faculty, of the support staff, of the students.

1420

Without an adequate consultation process—which, I would argue, is already in place and these policies are already in place—this looks like not even a solution looking for a problem, but actually an attempt to clamp down on free speech. We have seen this again and again in history. One of the first things that governments do when they're challenged is start to clamp down on academic life as a space for debate and dissent.

The issue here, truly, is that if you want to address mental health issues on campus, you do that by adequately funding the system and ceasing to allow funds to be diverted into the private sector. If you want to really support students, you do that through funding the system. You do that through making sure that all students have access, and affordable access, to post-secondary institutions. You recognize post-secondary as an investment in the collective good of Ontarians rather than some sort of privileged individual benefit. That would be where I would head with this.

You have to remember, the government of the day might enjoy this directive, but the government of tomorrow might not issue the same ones that this government would enjoy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

I'd like to ask the rabbi a question. I think the biggest concern I have around hate is that there's so much division and tension on campuses. Maybe you've had experience of how we appreciate locally the interfaith approach and how we can come together united. Can you speak about activities that you would encourage from campuses and how we can invest in an interfaith approach?

Rabbi Seth Goren: I would echo your take that interfaith and multi-faith approaches are incredible effective in terms of diffusing tensions before they even arise.

I would actually turn it over to my colleagues who are online, who probably have far more experience with this in a direct manner on campus. Mr. Lavi, Ms. Goldig and Ms. Dressler probably can speak to this more precisely.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Does one of you want to start?

Mr. Dean Lavi: Sure. I'll go first. No problem with that. I'm Dean Lavi. I work as a director at Hillel York, which is one of the nine universities that Hillel Ontario serves.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): About one minute remaining.

Mr. Dean Lavi: I'll just say very briefly so other people can speak that we've found that interfaith work is very necessary, and, at times, part of the issue is getting people to come to the table. A lot of the work needs to go in that direction because, especially since October 7, we've seen a significant rise in people at York, frankly, not wanting to work with anyone that is associated with any Jewish organization, and that's part of the problem.

I'll cede the rest of my time.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Anyone else? You've got about 20 seconds, MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Maybe you could speak to the definition. I think folks feel that it's important to have that openness to be able to be critical of any government. How does that impact your work?

Rabbi Seth Goren: I think one of the challenges that we face is around academic freedom, freedom of speech and principles—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We're out of time for this round. We'll move to the seven and a half minutes for the government's first round. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank all of the contributors today.

My first question is going to be to Seth. Thank you very much for being here. We've talked about free speech, and sometimes we know that it's a very positive thing on a university or campus environment, but sometimes it can step over the boundaries and these students feel, quite frankly, unsafe. I've seen this first-hand.

Safety on campus, as we all know, is an important factor to a student's success. You reflected on some of those safety issues that students face, and these are our future leaders. If they don't feel safe, how can they thrive, how can they acquire those positions, how can get to those jobs of the future? They need to know that they will not be harassed on campus.

Given we heard this from others, and colleges and universities have sometimes been in a situation where they, one, failed to report the incidents of hate and, two, follow up, what is your opinion or your experience on that when you merge together the idea of Bill 166?

Rabbi Seth Goren: I appreciate the question. One of the challenges that we find on campus is that, sometimes, reporting processes are a little bit difficult and cumbersome for students. Some universities have forms online where it's a little bit more clickable, it's a little bit more accessible, and that facilitates students actually sharing their experiences and allows the university to be more effective in responding to them.

I would say that there are best practices that have been adopted by organizations like Jewish Federations of North America that have reporting processes that allow people to share what their experiences have been like and allow organizations to respond to them.

Our experience on campus has been varied, I would say. There's some institutions, some departments and some individuals who are very supportive and are very encouraging of people reporting because they want to do better

and they know they can do better. And some have been less so. It's difficult to paint with a broad brush, but the institutions that have, I would say, an openness to understanding and have a cultural sensitivity to Jewish experiences are probably the institutions that are most effective at responding to student needs.

Ms. Laura Smith: So standardizing this for colleges and universities across Ontario would be beneficial.

Rabbi Seth Goren: I think so, and I think that there are plenty of institutions that have best practices and would be able to share what a standardization could look like.

Ms. Laura Smith: In your experience, when it is adjudicated, how long can that process be?

Rabbi Seth Goren: Longer than, often, students would like and have the patience for.

Ms. Laura Smith: And how would you say that has impeded that student's ability to go back or go?

Rabbi Seth Goren: I think it's incredibly burdensome. I'm thinking of one particular case, in particular, where the student is continuing to get emails during exam period, even though they have specifically said, "Please do not reach out to me. I am in exams. Please forward them instead to my mother and she will be able to filter, and she is authorized to respond in my stead."

When it takes this long and when it's being shared in these experiences, it has an incredibly adverse impact on students—not just experience, but also their academic performance. And it's the student who has to deal with the consequences of those things. It's the students who have to respond to what's going on. It's the students who have to pick up the pieces and we, as staff, are the people who are there with them every day and have to support them in getting through this.

Ms. Laura Smith: We have students that come into my office and there was one situation where I heard a student did not—the adjudication, actually, was intended to happen. She had graduated. It was two years later and she lived in Europe.

I think this is a positive step, would you say, to make sure that things are timely. What would you say would be a fair period of time to, let's say, have something dealt with or reported and then followed up?

Rabbi Seth Goren: It probably depends on the incident. There are some incidents where it's kind of an open-and-shut case. We have very concrete evidence in terms of what's happened. It's difficult to understand why that would stretch out for, I would say, even a month. There are some things that are more complicated, where more testimony is needed, and there, I would be understanding of a little bit more of a process.

The key thing, I think, is also about transparency. It's about understanding where students are in the process, what's being done, how long is this going to take, so that there is the aspect that you pointed to in terms of how long is this going to go, but there's also the idea of having university administrators who are responding to students and keeping them informed, and that strikes me as being equally critical.

Ms. Laura Smith: Time?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got 2:35.

Ms. Laura Smith: I will pass my time over to MPP Pierre, please.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pierre, go ahead.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, MPP Smith.

Good afternoon. Thank you to all of today's presenters. My questions will be for the Canadian Federation of Students. I just wanted to share with you that I was the former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities and actually spent the better part of a year touring the province to colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes, speaking with faculty members, speaking with students, speaking with staff and other employees, specifically around mental health issues, concerns, accessibility—the full gamut.

My first question will be around mental health. Some of the things I heard from students specifically is not knowing where to go to find support. Sometimes that information wasn't easily accessible and students found themselves in a moment of crisis, and that's just the wrong time for students to have to start navigating the system. Your thinking may be a little impaired at the time, and it's even more challenging to start sifting through information going to websites, sorting through information and trying to find how to reach out and get supports.

1430

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: That was one of the things I heard from a lot of the students that I spoke with. I'm just wondering what more, from a student perspective, do you think our colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes could be doing to support student mental health?

Ms. Adaeze Mbalaja: Absolutely. The first piece, which I believe you touched on, is accessibility. So many of these services on our campuses either are inaccessible to students or students aren't even aware that they exist, and that is because we need our institutions and, more broadly, everyone involved, to take a holistic approach, to take an approach in which we are outreaching to students and we are not trying to deal with these issues in the aftermath, but we are approaching proactively to ensure that mental health is something that is discussed all of the time on our campuses.

Further, you mentioned—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'm sorry. This round is finished for the government.

We'll now move to a seven-and-a-half-minute round for the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much to all three of the presenters this afternoon. I have a number of questions, but I did want to start with JP from OPSEU. I was really struck by your comment that it is the lack of staffing and resources that has caused issues on post-secondary campuses in terms of access to mental health supports and not a lack of policy. You talked about the chronic underfunding, the devastating underfunding of post-secondary and the college sector. You get 44% of the average of other Canadian provinces, and this has a real impact on the services that students receive.

Your members are present in all 24 Ontario colleges in the province. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about the work that they do to support students and how the lack of funding and resources affects their ability to provide the supports that students need?

President JP Hornick: Yes. Thank you. I'm joined here by support staff in universities, support staff in colleges and faculty in colleges, and I'll echo what Adaeze, my colleague from CFSO, is talking about, which is that the accessibility for students of mental health services is reliant on adequate staffing for those services. Proactive investment in mental health supports means that you see a decrease in the struggles that students are facing, particularly in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, housing affordability, climate change, global war. We're looking at folks who are facing what seem like insurmountable circumstances on top of trying to pursue post-secondary. So unless we're investing in the people that are able to provide those supports, and that includes our learning technologists to our counsellors to our front-line services to our faculty, we're actually underserving our students.

There is no lack of policy. Bill 166 strikes me as a very convenient piece of political theatre. Of course we should be fighting the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and racism on our campuses with everything that we have. We should be creating physically safe spaces for students. But the pursuit of post-secondary is supposed to make people slightly uncomfortable. It is to challenge our presumptions that we come into that environment with. But to do so well, we also need to provide the mental health supports and services, and that comes through adequate funding.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much.

I now want to go to CFS—Ontario. One of the concerns that was raised by OPSEU about the significant government intervention that is reflected in this bill was also mentioned, Adaeze or Mitra—I'm not sure who talked about it, but certainly it was mentioned in your presentation as well.

I wondered, from the student perspective, if you could tell us how you think the objectives of this bill could have been better accomplished without this significant government overreach that is reflected in Bill 166.

Ms. Mitra Yakubi: Yes, thank you for your question. I think, ultimately—JP has talked about it as well—there is a lack of funding across our post-secondary institutions. There is a lack of support for students, period. What we're seeing, whether that's through the experiences of students who are talking about their mental health support—mental health looks like a variety of things when it comes to what that support looks like. Adaeze talked about that approach being holistic.

What we really need is an investment in students, whether that's through the supports that we're able to provide—and not necessarily increasing the carceral approaches that our post-secondary institutions take through policing on our campuses, through security that actually intimidates students on our campuses and ultimately impacts both their mental health but also their performance within their classrooms.

I think there is a need for us to stress the fact that there is a lack of support across our post-secondary institutions in every avenue we can possibly think about, whether that's through their mental health resources, academic resources—any resources on campuses. We need to increase funding. We need to make sure we're providing support that is necessary for students.

One of the things that I want to talk about on interference is that we know that this government has implemented policies that prevent student unions from doing the work that they do on our campuses that provides support for students on campuses. Whether that's their food security through food centres, whether that's the sexual violence support centres, student unions and campus groups provide a pivotal community space. It's important that they be invested in and supported to continue to do the work that they do instead of being attacked for their work.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Mitra. And just going on from there, you mentioned in your presentation about the consultation process. There is no consultation process outlined in this bill whatsoever. Again, from the student perspective, can you talk about the importance of an extensive consultation process that involves students and faculty and staff and community and experts when you are developing policies like the ones that are required in this bill on student mental health and anti-hate and racism that would so directly affect the lives of students on our campuses?

Ms. Adaeze Mbalaja: Absolutely. Consultation is of the utmost importance. Our campuses are communities. Like JP said, we attend post-secondary education to be challenged, to be placed in community with one another. Consultation is of the utmost importance because, ultimately, we as students and as professionals on our campuses, whether that be the teaching assistants, the staff, the faculty, know what we are experiencing. We know the landscape of our campuses. We know what students are going through, and consultation provides us an avenue to directly share—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute remaining.

Ms. Adaeze Mbalaja: Absolutely; thank you—to directly share what's happening on our campuses and to be able to work together to identify what is needed: like Mitra already said, anti-carceral approaches, holistic approaches, more funding, more availability, more accessibility. Those things can only be told through the experiences of students having to wait so long to get access to these things, and often having access that isn't really helpful in them addressing their mental health.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you.

And finally, back to OPSEU: Was there any consultation with OPSEU, given that you represent members at all 24 colleges in the province on this bill?

President JP Hornick: No.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): All right. We'll move to the second round for the independent member. You've got four and a half minutes. You may begin, MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'll go back to the rabbi, because we were kind of cut off. I just wanted to say I'm so sorry for the harm that your community members and students have been experiencing.

But I wanted to ask you if you could speak to—I think folks are worried that they can't be openly critical of Israel or other governments or Hamas, and so maybe you can speak to how we juggle that. It's an emotional issue, and universities are places for debate. How do we make sure we can do that in a healthy way, without causing harm?

Rabbi Seth Goren: Sure. I think it's an understandable concern. I would start off by saying that the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech are not absolute, and they never have been. There are always constraints in terms of what people can say and what the consequences for what they say will be. So I don't know that we're talking about something that's a difference of kind; I think it's more a difference of degree.

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In terms of how do we figure out what those boundaries are, I think, as with anything else, when we talk about hate speech, when we talk about the damage that is caused to people, the way it upends people's lives, as it can be severe, I can only offer a Jewish perspective and a more general one, which is that a student should have the right to be on campus free from being attacked verbally and physically and personally because of the identities that they carry. I think that is an understandable reason for people to be concerned.

I would not argue that this is an easy road to hoe. I think it's difficult to try to figure out what the balance is. What I would say is that, having witnessed the catastrophic impact of some of the language and some of the terms that are being used on campus nowadays, it really provides us with the energy to try to figure out how do we protect our students from words that are more than just opinions, more than just perspectives, more than just a take on world politics. I think that that's—there are things that have happened on campus that are not just about free speech. Free speech isn't about putting a brick through someone's window. It's not about accosting someone on the street and screaming at them. It's not about wishing death to them, to their families and then to their entire community—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: No, 100%. No, I agree.

Rabbi Seth Goren: I'm sorry; I don't mean to be—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: No, I think the speaker before said she was worried that anti-Semitism was being defined as anything negative about Israel. Being critical of the state of Israel was being termed as anti-Semitism. I hear you on—there's so much hate going around, and we need timely responses. Otherwise, I think people feel like they can't go back to school, they can't go back to class or they can't trust the institution they're attending. I have a close friend who is Jewish and works in a school board and felt that her concerns weren't taken seriously. You're juggling many things, right? I guess that definition of anti-Semitism was something that an earlier speaker brought up.

Rabbi Seth Goren: To begin with, Hillel Ontario, as an organization, endorses the IHRA definition of anti-

Semitism. It's the definition that has been adopted, I believe, by the federal government and by the provincial government alike. The IHRA definition specifically says that criticism of Israel in and of itself is not anti-Semitism, that there may be things that cross the line, but it's not inherently that any criticism of Israel is anti-Semitism.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute remaining.

Rabbi Seth Goren: I don't think anyone in the Jewish community would say that that's necessarily the case. I certainly wouldn't.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

I just have one question for CFSO. You talked about some shortages in the sexual assault support centre. Can you elaborate on the impact of underfunding in those areas?

Ms. Adaeze Mbalaja: Absolutely. On our campuses, sexual violence is incredibly prevalent. We often see, for those of us who take on a leadership role as students on our campuses, an uptick during times like orientation, during times like spring break. We know, consistently, they are times our sexual violence centres are swamped, and it's not only in these busy times but consistently throughout the year. As we see more and more money and funding getting shifted away from these centres and into other initiatives, we know that that means one less person able to provide immediate support, one less person able to provide ongoing support, one less person who is now unable to be there in a moment of crisis, which means—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move from the independent members' questioning.

Seven and a half minutes to the government: MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'd just like to circle back to the Canadian Federation of Students. I know last time we were talking about mental health and our conversation was cut short because we ran out of time. I'm just wondering if you have anything you'd like to add. Just as a reminder, we were talking about students knowing where to turn to, knowing what supports were available, and then I asked you what more you think institutions can do to support student mental health that's not already in place today.

Ms. Adaeze Mbalaja: I think it was highlighted really well, both by Mitra and my colleague JP: ultimately, more funding, more availability, less carceral approaches, and culturally reflective and culturally competent care for students and for the entirety of the community as well.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: In the consultations that I did do with a number of students and stakeholders across the post-secondary sector, there are a variety of supports that are available in terms of service offerings, both on campus and referrals within the community, peer support, a stepped level of care with the student health services department.

I'm going to switch now and I'm going to ask the Canadian Federation of Students about the information in Bill 166 regarding transparency of costs. I think I heard mentioned earlier that education is costly and is in fact one of the barriers to access for a lot of students. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are around this legislation requiring a clear and transparent picture of costs associated, including tuition costs, ancillary fees, additional costs for

textbooks, lab equipment, any other kind of fees that are associated with attending post-secondary institutions, be that colleges, universities or Indigenous institutes—what your feelings are about knowing that information upfront.

Ms. Mitra Yakubi: Thank you for that question. I think in terms of transparency about cost, as the federation, we believe that post-secondary education should be free and accessible for everybody. If we had free education, we wouldn't have to worry about the transparency of said costs and things like that. Because, unfortunately, as a student, me knowing the ancillary fees and things like that is great, but ultimately, where I'm paying a lot of money to is the tuition fees. The fact that tuition fees exist is a barrier in and of itself for me to access post-secondary education, and there are thousands of students across the province that are experiencing that.

When it comes to the ancillary fees, I think there is a need for us to start to recognize that those are fees that were voted on and decided by membership. Those are democratic decisions that have been made by members on our campuses. When we think about our food support centres, when we think about our sexual violence support centres, when we think about the peer support centres, those are mostly provided by our student unions and our campus groups that do that important work on our campuses. I think there is a need for us to recognize that those services are provided because it was decided by members, and also continue to serve those holes that are left by institutions and the government themselves.

I think there is a need to kind of recognize the role that transparency cannot play, unfortunately, because they're paying so much money to be in post-secondary education. If we are to truly support students, we need to have free and accessible education, because at the end of the day, international students are going to continue to be subjected to differential tuition fees to make up for that loss of revenue and the loss of public funding that they receive from the government.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: So in terms of transparency of costs around additional fees and costs, is that a yes, that you would support the legislation that is asking for clear and transparent fees, including tuition, textbooks—the costs that are part and parcel to attending a post-secondary institution?

Ms. Mitra Yakubi: I think the transparency piece doesn't address the fact that students are still struggling with the high cost of tuition fees—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Okay, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is to Dean Lavi and Katie Goldig from Hillel. I noticed that Hillel Ontario is the largest regional Hillel organization in Canada, providing leadership development opportunities. Thank you for doing that.

In my riding of Mississauga–Malton, we're very unique: 61% of residents are born outside Canada and 79% are visible communities. Many of us come here for a better life and many of us have come for a safer life. Irrespective

of anything and everything, we came here because we felt it was a safer, inclusive place. As Canadians—no matter where we come from, but once you're here—thank you to Canada for giving us an opportunity. We're Canadians.

But what's going on in the last few months, we have seen something that—I asked somebody to write a question for me, and the question that came out was: "As an organization that works in the space of human rights, civil liberties and supporting youth, how do you strike the balance between supporting free speech and ensuring that a Canadian participating in debate with another Canadian feels safe and respected while these ideas are challenged?" Dean or Katie?

Mr. Dean Lavi: Should I go first?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Yes.

Mr. Dean Lavi: Sure. I think the most important thing to say—

Interruption.

Mr. Dean Lavi: Sorry, there's a dog in the house—is that I invite anyone who would like to come and join, once the strike is over at York, to come into the Hillel lounge and to hear the kind of dialogue that happens every single day among our students who are Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

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We feed them and we take care of them. They have an environment—

Interruption.

Mr. Dean Lavi: I'm so sorry. Katie, do you want to take over while I calm the dog down?

Ms. Katie Goldig: Sure.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got one minute remaining.

Ms. Katie Goldig: Sure. I'll just build off of that to say that we, of course, encourage free speech and open dialogue in all spaces and, I hope, in the entire university. I think the challenge is where we attempt to, or folks attempt to, generalize about a specific individual or identity or community. Often, in the case since October 7, from the Jewish community's perspective, there is a lot of demonization of the country of Israel, as well as a generalization and demonization of the Jewish population. That is where that free speech becomes hurtful and harmful and that is—again, open dialogue is encouraged, but when we start to generalize or when we start to target or when we start to speak ill about an entire community, it becomes really challenging for Jewish students, in particular.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you for that. That ends the government's seven and a half minutes.

We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wanted to go to Rabbi Goren. Thank you for coming today and sharing some of the experiences of the students you work with. I represent the riding of London West and, of course, Western has a very strong and active Hillel chapter.

I just wanted to share, and I'm sure you're aware of this, that at the end of October there was an incident on Western's campus where posters of the hostages had been displayed

and another student removed them, tore them down. There was a statement of condemnation that was issued about this incident from Hillel Western and Israel on Campus, the Muslim Students Association, the Palestinian Cultural Club and the Western USC, and I was so proud of the community to come together, to express this kind of unequivocal—that this is wrong, this is hate and this will not be tolerated on our campus.

But I'm very concerned. I've heard feedback about Bill 166, about the fact that the contents of the anti-hate policy are to be developed through ministerial directive, so there's going to be a top-down kind of directive as to what the policy shall include. There are concerns about whether this will suppress free speech and what the implications would be. I think that the Western incident, where we are continuing to experience both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia on campus—I am concerned that the coming together of student voices in a way that we saw at Western will be jeopardized by this top-down approach, and I wondered if you could just comment on that.

Rabbi Seth Goren: Sure. I understand and I appreciate your concern. I would say that that's probably less likely to be one of the outcomes, and this, I think, gets into what Ms. Clancy was talking about earlier, the idea of multi-faith conversations and how do we actually create the opportunity for learning that isn't hurtful and isn't hateful.

My position would be that with additional support and additional guidance, universities and colleges will be in a better position to be able to foster that type of dialogue and will be able to elevate it and put more of an emphasis on it in the role of student development, both identity, academic development and the like.

I would say that the Western example was wonderful, the one that you pointed out in terms of a consensus statement. I would also say that it's sad that that was really one of the few that we saw. One of the things I would say is that prior to COVID, we had very strong interfaith, multi-faith groups on campus. We had Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim dialogue groups that blossomed on our campuses, and I wouldn't underestimate the impact of COVID in terms of erasing so many of those relationships, and we were just starting to get those back. It was commented on earlier that often other groups do not want to engage with Hillel or with Jewish groups as a whole, that there often this sense of painting all of us with a very, very broad brush. But I would say that anything that gets to encouraging dialogue, encouraging conversation and the discussion of different opinions on these perspectives—I think it was Mr. Anand who earlier was talking about how do we cultivate an environment where people can share different perspectives. I do think that that's important. That's something we try and do. We try and make it so that we are one of the few spaces on campus, and I would say in students' lives, where they're going to hear different opinions, different perspectives. That's what university is supposed to be about. That's what college is supposed to be about, that type of personal, intellectual growth.

So I understand the concern. My understanding of the bill is that it is less likely to inhibit that type of growth and far more likely to encourage and to foster it.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think that the concern that several presenters have pointed out who are in the sector is the chronic underfunding of the sector, and so the concern about the lack of support and resources that will be there to foster that kind of dialogue that we need to see.

But I wanted to go to CFS—Ontario again and just kind of continue this discussion about the lack of resources because of the chronic underfunding of post-secondary education and what you are seeing from a student's perspective in terms of the impact of that underfunding on the mental health services and supports that are available for students, on the ability of institutions to provide the kind of support that students need.

Ms. Mitra Yakubi: Thank you for your question. I think, ultimately, what we're seeing across our campuses is that mental health of students are impacted by a variety of things, and I think there is a lack of understanding of that. For example, students are renters; students take transit; students are impacted by climate change. Students are impacted by a variety of issues. So ultimately, what we're seeing across our campuses is that there's a lack of funding. They have to pay their tuition fees. Oftentimes, they're choosing between paying their tuition fees and eating, taking the transit, paying for their health care if they're international students, because they're also not covered by OHIP. There are so many issues that students in general are impacted by that are not addressed.

What we're seeing more and more is that students are in distress and students do not have those supports that recognize those different experiences. It's not enough to say we have a mental health support centre—yay, that is good. There are two workers that are going to support, let's say, 15,000 students, because I know that's the experience that we had on my campus. There were two support workers that were there to provide support and care for 15,000 members. That is just not viable. That is just not enough. So what we're seeing time and time is that staff are also overworked, they are underpaid and the systems that exist are underfunded.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute remaining in this round.

Ms. Mitra Yakubi: That has a direct impact on how students continue experience and also their academic experience, because those go hand in hand.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much.

Just quickly back to OPSEU and JP: Again, on the issue of the underfunding, the government has touted its investment, which was only half of what its own expert panel had recommended. Did you see that funding announcement that came along with this legislation? Was that sufficient to address the fiscal crisis that our colleges and universities are facing?

President JP Hornick: Absolutely not, and I see this as a way to substitute policy, to try and address a problem that funding would help with. Because what we're hearing from all of us is that it's those one-on-one conversations, it's that attempt to create civil discourse by engaging one another as humans which cannot—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I want to thank everyone for their presentation. I want to thank the members for their questions.

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN CAMPUS
MENTAL HEALTH/CMHA ONTARIO
CUPE ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): For the 3 p.m. presentations, we have two presentations, both in-person. Again, we're going to be splitting this round of questions, with seven and a half minutes starting to the government, then followed by the official opposition with seven and a half, and then the independent member with four and a half.

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So you have seven minutes, the first presentation, from the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health/CMHA Ontario.

Marija, do you want to introduce yourself for the purpose of Hansard? The floor is yours.

Ms. Marija Padjen: Wonderful. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to present our perspective on Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024.

My name is Marija Padjen, and I'm the director for the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. I also serve as the chief clinical officer of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division. I'm joined today by my colleague Camille Quenneville, CMHA Ontario's CEO.

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, or CICMH, is a unique partnership between Colleges Ontario, the Council of Ontario Universities, the College Student Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division. Our position provides us with an understanding of not only the state of mental health on campuses but across community mental health in general in Ontario. We are passionately committed to engaging and supporting Ontario colleges and universities in their commitment to student mental health and well-being.

We thank the Ministry of Colleges and Universities for our funding and, in particular, their renewed three-year commitment to us. This allows us stability as we continue to provide vital resources and support to Ontario's post-secondary sector.

A recent report from the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations found that three quarters of students reported experiencing negative mental health in their studies. Indigenous students, younger students, students with lower incomes, students identifying as 2SLGBTQ+ and those living with pre-existing mental health concerns were most at risk.

The cost of properly caring for post-secondary students' mental health and well-being is a growing concern for both post-secondary and community sectors. We acknowledge the importance of mental health strategies in providing a high-level road map for care. The lack of stable and suf-

ficient provincial funding to both properly create such policies and, more importantly, execute them will function as a further barrier.

For campuses that already have a policy in hand, the issue is the acute need for stable and ongoing funding for the work that must be done to put policies into action. A further concern is that the creation of mental health policies based on red tape requirements with no funding will consume resources and provide no real value to campus well-being.

The recent Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario report highlights several structural and systemic forces that make it challenging for institutions to implement programs, hire staff and plan comprehensively for the long term. These challenges include short spending periods and one-time competitive grants, which impede sustainable strategies for enhancing student mental health and impact staff retention.

Addressing student mental health and well-being requires a comprehensive, community-level approach transcending beyond the confines of clinical practice. It involves creating a supportive environment where students feel valued and understood, with access to resources and support systems that extend into the fabric of the community.

In recent years, through our campus community project, CICMH has made efforts to provide a continuity of care through bridging services when students transition into the community. However, being part of CMHA Ontario also makes us keenly aware of the challenges the community sector has in delivering service with current resourcing.

When it comes to policies and rules on racism and hate, the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism are firmly woven into the work of CICMH. In the past few years, we have developed several resources on anti-oppressive practice, supporting 2SLGBTQ+ students and to address the growing rise of racism within the province. In fact, our anti-oppressive tool kit has been our most viewed resource in the past year. It includes information on approaches such as the intersectionality-based policy analysis framework to analyze current and new campus policies.

We passionately believe that campuses need to create safe learning, teaching and working environments for students, staff, faculty, as well as to address hate speech, harassment and discrimination. Many campuses have already developed policies and procedures that are significantly broader than the areas covered in Bill 166 and comply with legal and statutory obligations.

We feel strongly that campuses need to continue to work to foster environments that are free of discrimination, bias and harassment and that institutions should promote civil and constructive dialogue on campus. Furthermore, cultural safety should be integrated into mental health services across the province.

As the government of Ontario implements policies and regulations related to Bill 166, CICMH recommends:

(1) Increase long-term and stable government funding for student mental health supports, particularly at a time when post-secondary institutions are facing significant financial instability and are being asked to drive efficiencies.

(2) Help fund current initiatives and student services in place to address hate speech, harassment and discrimination.

(3) Enhance the core set of community based, culturally safe mental health and addictions supports across Ontario that individuals can access throughout their lifespan, including throughout their post-secondary journey.

(4) Allow flexibility in how institutions use funds to ensure they respond in the most effective and efficient way to the needs of their unique student base.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you. Our second presentation is Mr. Fred Hahn from the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Mr. Hahn, if you want to come forward and state your name for the purposes of Hansard. You have seven minutes. And then, following your address, both of you will receive questions from the members of provincial Parliament.

Mr. Hahn, the floor is yours.

Mr. Fred Hahn: My name is Fred Hahn. I'm the president of CUPE Ontario. The Canadian Union of Public Employees is the province's largest union. We have 290,000 members in Ontario; that includes 30,000 who work in the university sector. On behalf of our union, I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to you on Bill 166 today.

The bill's name is rather benign sounding, the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, but it doesn't clearly articulate some of the concerns that we have about what the bill is actually going to do. We believe Bill 166 carries with it political aims of the current government and focuses them on our universities and colleges. Under the guise of protecting students, the bill would dictate to colleges and universities, stifle intellectual freedom and threaten traditions of academic independence in our higher education sector. Anywhere else in the world, we would call legislation like Bill 166 an assault on free speech, on the independence of institutes of higher learning. In fact, Bill 166 sets up colleges and universities for a degree of political interference we've never seen in our post-secondary institutions.

Perhaps the most alarming change is that it enshrines a minister's ability to issue directives related to racism and hate on Ontario's campuses. This allows the government to infringe upon universities' and colleges' own anti-racism and anti-hate policies, and on free speech and academic freedom on campus. Universities were originally given self-governance to stop this kind of political interference in day-to-day affairs. Academic and operational policies are matters for boards of governors and academic senators. The bill opens the door to unprecedented intrusion on that self-governance.

The language of Bill 166 enshrines the Minister of Colleges and Universities to determine definitions related to racism and hate, including what constitutes anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Ministerial directives could be used to impose the inclusion of any topic or element into rules or policies dealing with combatting hate and racism, which has troubling implica-

tions in light of the current debate, particularly around anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism and freedom of speech on Ontario campuses.

Bill 166 opens the door to the imposition of the controversial definition of "anti-Semitism" of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, IHRA. CUPE Ontario has made no secret that our union objects to this definition, but in fact, more than 100 different Israeli and international civil society groups join us in doing the same. We view this definition as a limit of freedom of expression and limiting the ability to criticize the state of Israel. For its part, the Ford government has adopted the IHRA definition through an order in council in 2020, but I think we might all agree that so much has changed since then.

Under Bill 166, the Minister of Colleges and Universities could impose the IHRA definition to silence on-campus pro-Palestinian groups and activities, or anyone who supports the right of Palestinians to self-determination or who challenges Zionism as an ideology. Given the Ford government's track record of undemocratic practices and secret deals, we're very concerned with the underlying objectives of Bill 166.

Another criticism of the bill centres around its overly broad usage of the word "hate." Unless the intention is to stifle freedom of expression in higher education, it would be far better to base the definitions of "hate" and "racism" in our current human rights legislation frameworks to minimize any subjective framing. Our existing human rights bodies should determine the threshold of whether or not hate has occurred, not directives imposed by ministers carrying out the political will of any party.

1510

In the rare instances where a college or university doesn't have a policy, the policies of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the regulations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act always apply.

From a union's perspective, enshrining ministerial directives in legislation would allow a government to dictate the content of workplace policy. Bill 166 creates a distraction in labour relations and arguably interferes with the ability of the parties to freely negotiate. What then does this bill achieve, at the cost of eroding independent governance and labour relations? It only succeeds in an overreach by government to apply the current political values or create an environment where any government could impose their political values to create wedge issues.

Regarding the bill's requirement for every college and university to have a student mental health policy, I'd like to point out that most of the province's 47 post-secondary institutions already dedicate substantial resources to addressing the issues of mental health and racism.

The best initiatives were developed collaboratively over years in response to on-campus needs and thanks to the work and dedication of administrators, faculty, students and unions. We look at the internal process at the University of Toronto, for example, in 2021, when it accepted recommendations from its Antisemitism Working Group as an excellent example of what collaboration and listening can achieve.

Rather than having the minister impose their own initiatives, the government should work to ensure success of existing policies that address mental health, racism and hate. It should ensure that such policies are generated by using institutions with meaningful consultation of students, unions and associations.

And finally, if our government really cared about mental health inequality, it would put real resources into solving these problems rather than trying to micromanage workplace policy. It would end the affordability crisis for students, the fiscal crisis in post-secondary institutions. Bill 166 does none of that.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about one minute remaining.

Mr. Fred Hahn: Absent from additional funding, the current fiscal constraints on post-secondary institution make it difficult, if not impossible, to effectively implement any real change.

So, with all of that, we'd ask that the government consider withdrawing the bill.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to our first round of questioning. We'll start with the seven-and-a-half-minute round to the government. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Mr. Speaker, this question is directed—first of all, thank you, everyone, for being here today.

This question is directed to Mr. Hahn. I think we can all agree in this room that students, parents, grandparents work very hard to send our students to school. I'm saying this as a parent of children in post-secondary. Given these sacrifices, do you believe an organization or a representative of that organization has the right to communicate to their faculty—that being the teachers' assistants, graduate assistants, part-time library assistants—a direction to divert teaching to another curriculum, abandon lesson plans and say teach another issue that has nothing to do with their course selection? Once again, keep in mind that they go through terrible sacrifice to be there, and then they get to class, and they're advised that they're not going to be learning that.

Should this be allowed in classrooms? Should representatives, faculty be allowed to walk into the classroom when they are dealing with a math study program, a nursing study program, a computer study program, and the instructor is not doing that, and they're focused on something else? Should they be allowed to do that?

Mr. Fred Hahn: Thanks for your question. I'm not aware of the specifics of what you're talking about. What I would want to do is agree with you that parents and families and young people go to great lengths to achieve the ability to attend post-secondary institutions, that the current government is doing little to actually help to alleviate the growing cost of tuition. I mean, you've capped tuition. The challenge becomes the financial squeeze this puts on institutions.

There's no question that the way in which courses are conducted in institutions of higher learning should, in our view, be left up to the departments and the folks on the ground of those institutions. With all due respect to you and me, I am not involved in those things and neither are

you. For any government to imagine that it could exact its own opinion and therefore direct what should happen at a university is, I think, a mistake. It belies the very idea of academic freedom, of ensuring that institutions have the independence and the autonomy to make sure that the people at those institutions are actually putting together curriculums and experiences and opportunities for young people to think broadly about all of the issues that we are all dealing with in our world.

I think there's lots of important work for ministers of government and for MPPs to be doing. There are lots of important things for those of us in the union movement to be doing. I think there are real people who are in charge of this already, and this bill represents a level of interference the likes of which we've never seen in our province's history.

Ms. Laura Smith: But I think you would agree that if I a student is walking into class to learn of nursing, of computer studies, and they've paid to do that and their parents have sacrificed and they have sacrificed—they've probably taken a job over the summer to cover for that—and they're not able to do that, do you believe the faculty should be able to go against that sort of direction? Do you think the faculty organizations should remain impartial when it comes to these sorts of issues?

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think that if we're going to talk about nursing as an example, it would be key in the instruction of future nurses to talk about the impact of white supremacy and racism, to talk about the impact of discrimination and the way in which it plays out, particularly in the health care system. I would think that should already be a part of the curriculum, and as I understand it, having heard little bits and pieces from various faculty folks and even on the CBC, this is in fact increasingly part of the way in which our academic institutions are grappling with things like the colonial history of Canada, the anti-Black racism—

Ms. Laura Smith: But if my child is walking into a computer studies program, I want them to get a computer studies program. I don't want them to get anything else.

Mr. Fred Hahn: No, agreed, and I think that the challenge becomes imagining that any course of any kind of study that doesn't talk about the ways in which discrimination wraps their way into all of the different systems—including computer science. It's well documented.

Ms. Laura Smith: I think that would be left for the humanities, though, would it not? There are a whole host of other courses where those children—sorry; I'm old, so I'm always referring to them as children—where students can get these humanities can get these and get that interaction. I appreciate that.

I'm going to pass my time over to MPP Nolan Quinn.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Quinn.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: My question is for Ms. Padjen from CMHA Ontario. Do you believe setting a baseline for mental health services and resources available to students is a strong step forward in supporting students at colleges and universities across the province?

Ms. Marija Padjen: I think it depends on how we define that baseline. I think in terms of on paper, that appears great, but what does that actually look like at individual institu-

tions when we're comparing apples to oranges is where there is sometimes a deeper need to look at the context. A school the size of Northern College and a school the size of U of T, the baseline is going to look very different because what they have accessible to them is going to look very different, including what's going on in the community around them.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Can you explain the importance of why we should be informing the students of resources to help with their mental health and physical health when they first arrive at the school and not after giving them a list of supports that they can work with?

Ms. Marija Padjen: I would argue that even before they enter that school, they should be given that information, and in fact, most schools are doing that. Many, many schools, as students are actually going through even choosing the school, it's quite clear what they have access to. I know this both in terms of my work and as my child is about to start post-secondary. That process comes even before they enter and it's repeated throughout. So one of the things that we're seeing is that throughout their two to four years, it's repeated to them a number of times.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pang, you've got about a minute.

Mr. Billy Pang: This one is for CMHA again. I have a child in post-secondary. Every day she comes home exhausted, stressed, with tons of schoolwork—thank God this is the last week of her school year.

What are some ways that you believe a school's faculty or administration can take a major step to support students' mental health today that doesn't require new funding or staff? Obviously, it is important that there are other things that can be done already while things like creating an on-campus resource centre get under way.

Ms. Marija Padjen: I think there's lots that can be done. We take a whole-campus approach in terms of our work, meaning we believe everybody on campus plays a part in creating a mentally safe environment for students, and everybody's own mental health plays a big part in creating a psychologically safe campus environment, meaning I think everyone from cafeteria staff to faculty to administration—

1520

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay. We'll now move to the official opposition. MPP Sattler, seven and a half minutes.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to both of the presenters for attending the committee today.

I want to address my first couple of questions to the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. I really appreciate your referencing the HEQCO study that was just released in January of this year. I found it very useful when I was reviewing this bill and the financial commitments that were made by the government to support post-secondary students' mental health needs. Certainly, the HEQCO report makes many of the same recommendations that you made today in your presentation; in particular, the need to increase funding for institutions to deliver mental health supports for students.

The government's bill came with some additional funding. There was \$8 million for a post-secondary mental health action plan over three years, which is \$2.7 million per year—47 post-secondary institutions in the province.

I wonder if you could speak in more detail about what kind of resources you think are necessary to deliver the kinds of mental health supports that students need and if you feel that the issue was a lack of policy at institutions instead of funding.

Ms. Marija Padjen: To answer the second question, that's easy—it's more the lack of funding. Most schools—and I have a list of them in front of me—already have a mental health policy in place, and/or it's part of a larger policy that they have in place in terms of student well-being etc. So most of them do have the work—it's, if you're going to create a policy, how do you create a policy that you can actually implement? So, first, the cost of a policy has to be acknowledged. To create a really fulsome policy where there is student engagement, where there is faculty and staff engagement, is a big, big cost to schools—so to do it well costs, and then to actually implement those.

In terms of what has to happen, it sometimes varies—again, apples to oranges—when you're talking a smaller school to a bigger school. I tend to reference things like the stepped care framework, which looks at low need, low intervention, high need, high intervention, and having the opportunity for students to also have choice in the type of intervention as they go between those.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: You talked about the cost of developing policy and doing the consultation that's necessary to make good policy. This bill, Bill 166, doesn't include any reference to consultation—it's totally ministerial directive in determining content of the policy. Do you think that's going to be constructive and positive for students in our post-secondary institutions?

Ms. Marija Padjen: I'll speak to my knowledge of mental health policies. For a mental health policy to be truly effective, there has to be significant consultation on that campus. It can take a year to two years for a mental health policy that truly embodies the needs of that school to actually come into fruition.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much.

I now want to turn to Mr. Hahn from CUPE Ontario. You represent 30,000 workers in Ontario universities, and I'm sure you are hearing the same thing I am hearing from many of those workers about the chronic staff shortages. Vacancies are not being filled, retirements are not being replaced—incredible workload burdens on staff.

What does this mean in terms of staff's ability to deliver the mental health supports that students need in Ontario campuses?

Mr. Fred Hahn: Thanks so much for the question.

I really want to also appreciate my co-presenter for recognizing the importance of everyone on a campus and the entire campus community having the capacity to enjoy positive mental health experiences in their jobs.

The reality, sadly, of too many of our members, because of increased workload pressures, because of the fear of contracting out of their work, because of the necessity—

most of our academic members, for example, have to reapply for their jobs, if not every semester, then every year—the precarity that is implied there. The way in which all of these things contribute to stress for those workers means that, when taken as a whole, it negatively impacts the capacity of the entire campus community to support a positive mental health outcome for students.

Naturally, our members, in the work that they engage in, whether they be food service workers, whether they be maintenance and trade workers, whether they be academic workers or library workers at universities, all of them care deeply about the mental health of students. But there is a growing recognition that without sufficient supports for workers, their own mental health suffers, and therefore, the collective mental health of the campus community is negatively impacted.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: You pointed out in your presentation the level of political interference that this bill represents in terms of the workings of our post-secondary campuses with these ministerial dictates as to what is to be in these new policies that will now be required. Can you expand a little bit more about what is lost when institutions don't consult with those 30,000 workers that you represent, when they don't consult with students, when they don't consult with their local communities on what would be an effective mental health policy, what would be an effective anti-hate-and-racism policy?

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think that, again, my co-presenter has quite eloquently pointed out the ways in which good mental health policies are most effective when they involve deep consultation. I would say the same—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about one minute remaining.

Mr. Fred Hahn: I would say the same thing is true when it comes to combatting hate—anti-Indigenous hate, racism, sexism, sexual violence. All of these matters need the university community to come together.

What is deeply problematic here is not only that it will result in bad policy, but it also represents a degree of political interference that, quite frankly, no matter who was sitting in government, no matter which party of which political stripe, no politician should be able to have a dictate on these kinds of policies at academic institutions in our province. It is deeply against the entire history of post-secondary institutions and the autonomy that they have achieved in our province, with good reason. Not just here but around the globe, there are real reasons why institutions of higher learning need to be able to decide these issues and questions for themselves. Within the legal frameworks that already exist in our human rights code and our Occupational Health and Safety Act, not only is this—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to—we've got the first round of questions. Thank you.

For the independent member, you've got four and a half minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My first question is for the Canadian Mental Health Association. What I've noticed in mental health in the community, and maybe you could speak to how this looks on campus, is that because there's a move

to make things cheaper, you don't get the same depth. A lot of those experienced clinicians, because of work precarity, move on, and it makes it very challenging to have high-quality, experienced clinicians and a lot of turnover. Can you explain what you see in campuses because of this kind of project-based, short-term underfunding?

Ms. Marija Padjen: In terms of the number of folks that are leaving campus mental health, there has been a large turnover across the province, I think partly due to the precarious situation they're in in terms of funding and salaries. There's also a massive level of burnout. The last four years have been incredibly difficult, both in community and on campus. There is competition for great staff, and obviously there are sectors that have more funding to be able to take on those staff.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you for mentioning burnout. Do you see anything in this bill that addresses the burnout of the mental health staff?

Ms. Marija Padjen: Again, I would say no because it talks about things at a very high level, but a good mental health strategy will look at, again, a whole-campus approach to mental health.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So you're hopeful that there will be consultation of the people delivering mental health services going forward?

Ms. Marija Padjen: Again, in terms of the creation of a proper mental health strategy, it would look to consult and engage everyone on campus, including staff.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

My next question is for our rep from CUPE—thank you; sorry, I'm bad with names. You talk a lot about this reach. Have some of your staff members commented on what the impact could be on their work with this jurisdictional creep?

1530

Mr. Fred Hahn: In advance of coming to present, one of the processes we have inside is to talk specifically to those workers elected to represent the sector and in our locals in the sector, particularly, in this case, some of the academic locals. But certainly even our service and support locals have real concerns about the way in which—what this bill would facilitate and allow is, again, unprecedented in the history of post-secondary education in Ontario. There are real concerns about the way in which this would not understand and respect the work that is already under way in various campuses, some of which our members in those locals have been deeply engaged in. It's why I'm here today; they asked me to come on their behalf to represent the concerns that they've expressed to me.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. I guess I'm worried, at a time of major fiscal difficulties, that we could be reinventing a wheel that exists and maybe we could make the wheel worse or we could make the wheel better in some cases, but how do we—what is your hope for institutions?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's about one minute remaining.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Maybe I'll ask CUPE on how this won't interfere with good work that's already happening, if it exists.

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think the only way to ensure that this doesn't interfere with good work that's already under way or has happened is for the government to withdraw the legislation.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Okay. Thank you very much. How do you feel about that, you know?

Ms. Marija Padjen: Again, in terms of mental health policy, I think that the policy is only worth the engagement that it's built on. So, anyone could create a policy—you could print out a policy tomorrow—but if you want a true mental health policy, there has to be work and engagement built in.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): All right. We'll move to the government's seven and a half minutes. MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Mr. Chair, through you, again, to CICMH: As we talked earlier—that this is the last week of the school year. I believe a lot of students may need to deal with a challenge when they are leaving the campus this week. When they have mental health concerns but cannot be able to access them when they go home for holidays or over the summer—so, can you talk a bit about how we might be able to bridge the gap?

Ms. Marija Padjen: In terms of students over the course of the summer, I think we need to acknowledge that a lot of students are actually going to school throughout the school year. So there are numerous schools that are running their programs all the way through the summer months, which again creates further burden on the schools in terms of finances. And other schools, when they return home for the summer, will be accessing community mental health services. And as everybody in the room knows, community mental health is also very, very stretched right now.

Mr. Billy Pang: So how do they access those types of services through the school campus? Because they may not know about what service the community can provide locally.

Ms. Marija Padjen: Many of the campuses do provide a linkage into the community. So, one of the things we've been doing is really looking at creating bridges between campuses and community mental health such as CMHAs across the province, but also connecting them to supports that might be available in their hometown during the summer months. So, most of the counsellors will also be supporting students in connecting them with supports over the course of those three or four months that they may not be on campus.

Mr. Billy Pang: So, would there be a discontinuity—

Ms. Marija Padjen: There would be. There's also waiting lists, so just because you need the service and you've gone home to the community, there may be such a significant waiting list that you don't access it over the course of the summer.

Mr. Billy Pang: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for Marija. I was just looking at the campus mental health website and just really wanted to thank you for all the work that you have

done, and looking at all the tool kits and resources that you've developed for the sector.

You talked previously about each college and university having their own set of policies, and everyone is kind of at a different place in the development of their policies. So, just curious about your thoughts on best practices and sharing resources and if that's—you know, I look at the tool kits and the resources on your website, and I think how valuable those tools are, not only for student wellness centres, but for students, for employees, for faculty members.

I was curious about your thoughts on the best ways to collaborate, work together. How can we share those resources so that everyone is not doing something differently? We don't have to start all over every time. We can look at what's working, what's working really well, and then adopt and spread across the sector.

Ms. Marija Padjen: That's much of the work of the centre. We actually, through our tool kits, make recommendations on topics such as supporting 2SLGBTQ+ students, such as anti-oppressive practice. So it's all outlined there.

We also create forums through our communities of practice, where schools can come together and share best practices and learn from each other. We do the heavy lifting in terms of finding those materials for them, as well.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Bill 166, if it passes and a directive is created on mental health—what are the top three things that you would like to see mentioned outlined and implemented?

Ms. Marija Padjen: I would say number one is engagement. A fulsome mental health policy should be based on engagement.

I also have to address the fact that mental health policy should not only fall on the wellness department. A true mental health policy will be reflective of all policies on campus—so everything from how we register etc. will have an impact on mental health.

The third piece is, I think we need to ensure in this realm, in a mental health policy, that we're looking at intersectionality. As I came in, the student federation was speaking. Students are facing many issues around things like food insecurity, around housing insecurity—all of those also impact their mental health. So, again, any mental health policy should also be looking at intersectionality.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: How much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have two minutes and 20 seconds.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Okay.

Something that I spend some time thinking about is, we have students who are leaving high school—and understanding that not all post-secondary students are 18 years old. We have a lot of mature learners, a lot of second career students, a lot of people who are newcomers to Canada who may be participating, taking courses at their local post-secondary institute. But for the young students, those who are leaving high school and then transitioning to post-secondary—for a lot of them, it's their first time living away from mom and dad, and now they're not only entering a very academically intense environment, but there are

other pressures—feeding yourself, getting along with roommates. A lot of new stresses are introduced.

I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on proactive measures that we can take to help bridge the gap for those younger students, things we can do to support them, because so many families—it's almost like you're at home, you're part of this nurturing family, and then all of a sudden when you leave and go to school, you're expected to handle it all.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute.

Ms. Marija Padjen: I'm smiling because most of what you mentioned, we have a resource for, so everything from how to get along with your roommate—and we've also developed tools for that transition from high school into university, college and/or Indigenous institutes. So there are pieces that we have created, and a lot of it comes down to also ensuring that we work with the secondary schools, so that some of that is also built into the last year of secondary school.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Do you track any data or information on the number of people who are accessing your resources or do you—

Ms. Marija Padjen: We do. I can tell you, just because I finished our year-end, between our two websites, we were over 100,000 users last year.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Do you know who those users are?

Ms. Marija Padjen: I can say high level, in terms of like province, in terms of—but I can't tell you in terms of profession.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: No, I'm just thinking, is it students driving—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks to the government for this round.

We've got the final round of questioning for the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam, you have seven and a half minutes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to you both for your presentations—a very informative day so far.

My first question would be for you, Ms. Padjen. I'm just very interested in knowing: Your organization, as it sits within the post-secondary institute ecosystem—you are in contact with colleges, universities, undergraduate students and the College Student Alliance. That's pretty much everyone in that space that operates there. I'm just curious: Because this bill, as it sits before us, specifically deals with mental health and instructions to all PSIs that they're to go forth and develop a mental health policy, was your organization or any of the other organizations consulted or at least informed that this was coming?

1540

Ms. Marija Padjen: I can't speak to the other organizations. I, myself, was not.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay. I'm just also curious to know—because consultation is very important in developing any type of policy that needs to have broad buy-in. You want to know what your audience is interested in so you can therefore tailor the policy to meet their needs. With respect to the challenges that post-secondary students are facing, especially when it comes to mental health, de-

pression and anxiety, my understanding is that one of the top reasons why they're feeling so stressed out, if I would just use this very informally, is the financial stress and burden that they're facing. Has that been your experience as well?

Ms. Marija Padjen: I don't know if I can say it's the top one, but it's definitely up high. I think there's many other factors that would lead to stress and anxiety among students, but, 100%, we hear more and more about financial strain, in particular around food insecurity. That has been a very hot topic on campus.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I was surprised to learn that many of the campuses now are actually operating food banks, both for their students but also for their teaching assistants and sometimes for contract faculty.

I'm also aware, as told to me by the Canadian Federation of Students recently, that students are finding it increasingly difficult to access services because of the long wait-lists. Has that been your experience with your students?

Ms. Marija Padjen: There has been a long wait-list for services. I'm going to phrase it—not even just around wait-lists, but there's a huge strain. More and more students—the numbers are not going down in terms of the need. Over the last few years—I've been with the centre for six years—year over year, we're seeing more and more students who are identifying themselves as having mental health concerns.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Right. And you can't really learn or do well in school when you're so burdened with mental health issues. Would that be a fair—

Ms. Marija Padjen: It will definitely have an impact on learning and retention, yes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The Mental Health Commission of Canada—I just happened to be on their website—has a national standard for mental health and well-being for post-secondary students. This is a policy that reaches every single province and territory, I believe—

Ms. Marija Padjen: I sat on the technical committee for that. It's not a policy; it's a standard. There are these finite, little differences between a standard and a policy. But yes, the Mental Health Commission put that out in 2020.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: That would apply to Ontario, would it not?

Ms. Marija Padjen: It applies to all schools, and many schools are actually adopting it.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: And is that why, out of the 47 post-secondary institutions, the majority of them have a mental health policy in some form—

Ms. Marija Padjen: I would say that that has influenced it, but I would say that, even prior to that, many schools were already beginning to do the work.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay. So really what's missing in this bill is actually resources and funding in order for the post-secondary institutions to be able to resource the mental health supports on campus to support the students.

Ms. Marija Padjen: That is a big need.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay. Thank you.

My next set of questions is for Mr. Hahn—always nice to see you. I am really curious about what you had to say about the fact that you raised some concerns about perhaps

government overreach, that it could be dangerous and chilling. You did also reference the fact that we have some policies in place already, namely the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code. As I did a quick scan of universities and what they have sitting on their websites, it looked, again, like most of them are following the OHRC, as well as the OHSA. Is there anything else that's needed at the university level when it comes to addressing hate and, in particular, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and every form of hate?

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think that those frameworks—the human rights code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act are like the frames, and many institutions have been very busy filling in the picture and working on mechanisms to actually deal with these matters. Both of those pieces of legislation tend to deal with complaints. What we're trying to do here is root out the problem before it gets to a complaint—actually helping people to understand the ways in which, for example, white supremacy, colonialism, anti-LGBTQ sentiment is worked into our society.

There's a great deal of work that's been done, and it's why it's so problematic that any government, concerning itself with many other things, might think that it was sufficiently connected that it could direct what should happen on university campuses, when there are already people there doing that work in really important ways.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: As I again scan the university websites on how they deal with complaints, most of them are saying, “Stand up and say something. Report it if you see something. Or contact the police or we'll do it for you.” I think I recognize that that's very reactionary. By that time, the harm is already done. People are already feeling the hurt and perhaps a sense of not being safe.

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health—

Ms. Marija Padjen: Longest title ever.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's a great title. But Mr. Hahn, I recognize that they actually put forth a recommendation—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, sir—that I'd like to get you to comment on. That recommendation is to help fund the current initiatives and student services in place to address hate speech, harassment and discrimination. Would you say that that is a good way for the government to support PSIs in addressing safer campus environments?

Mr. Fred Hahn: Yes, none of this will happen magically. It all requires funding and attention, particularly of student services—and some of those important, often unseen services—on campuses that actually help to solidify the university community.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: And a final question to you both: How successful will policy be or this legislation be without deep engagement and conversation with the sector?

Mr. Fred Hahn: It would not be successful at all.

Ms. Marija Padjen: Agreed. There needs to be deep consultation and engagement.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you both.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We will now move to the final round of questioning with the independent member. You've got your four and a half minutes. Please proceed.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm a social worker. I come from the secondary school and elementary school level, so I have a deep understanding—it's recent that I left. So I do see how much the needs have grown, especially related to social anxiety, young people facing panic attacks and increase in that area. I guess one of the main things I notice is that young people disconnect and they isolate often, and that puts a lot of negative impact on their overall perspective.

I guess one of the questions I have is: Earlier, some of our reports have shared that there has been an 11% increase in the number of students in Ontario colleges and universities. At least for the colleges, they said that since the 10% cut and the freezing of tuition, funding has gone down 30%. When you think about all the activities on a school campus and how much the needs have grown and how much resources have lessened—sorry, Marija? Okay. What do you think about the overall picture or life of students? I know I'm wandering a little bit, but mental health is so much more than just a counsellor for one visit, but it's their whole lives. So how do you see us doing better to weave mental health supports into the different aspects of student life?

Ms. Marija Padjen: Again, a mental health policy would go beyond just the counselling department. It would look at everything on campus, from how housing looks to really more upstream mental health intervention, so more of the promotion. Why are students isolated? To me, the question is: What are we doing earlier on in the course? What are we doing earlier on when they arrive on campus, rather than when we're waiting for them already to be in crisis and then searching and seeking support? So it's ensuring some of the more upstream pieces are in hand as well.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What do you think is needed to be proactive?

Ms. Marija Padjen: For students to be proactive?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: For the schools to be proactive in ensuring well-being.

Ms. Marija Padjen: I think it's, again, taking a whole-campus approach and making sure that it doesn't fall just under the wellness department. Everyone on campus should be playing a part—so how residences are set up, residence dons, cafeteria workers. I mean, the cafeteria workers are the ones that are going to notice a change in the student before anyone else. Again, everybody plays a part in creating a safe environment for everyone.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, and I think that a lot of the training I got went beyond—about how do we connect with every member of the school system to make sure.

I do want to respond to MPP Smith. I was a business student, and I was hopeful that I would get an ethics class. I got a quarter credit. I think our economy would be different if we understood the impact of the business decisions we made on all aspects of life.

I did want to follow up on Mr. Hahn. If you could share a little about what your stakeholders are sharing about the impact of this funding shortage on their work.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think it plays out in different ways for different kinds of work that our members do on campuses.

Often, for food service workers and custodial and maintenance workers, tradespeople, there's a difficulty in retaining and attracting people to the work; therefore, workloads grow, and that grows stress. With the academic workers, the very precarious nature of the work—that they have to reapply for their jobs every six to 12 months and that they're paid only for a small portion of the work that they actually do—means that they have to stitch together a series of jobs across a series of institutions. All of this adds to the stress for the work that they do.

It's quite remarkable: At York University—a university that just completed a work stoppage, a strike there—50% of the instruction was done by workers, most of whom are all precarious, all part-time, all stitching together jobs at several institutions, and yet they do the bulk of teaching at that institution.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you very much for your presentations. We appreciate it.

We're running a little ahead of time because we had two presenters. So, in all fairness to the group that's not here, we'll have a short recess until the advertised time of 4 o'clock, when we'll continue our proceedings.

The committee recessed from 1552 to 1600.

CENTRE FOR ISRAEL
AND JEWISH AFFAIRS
ALMA MATER SOCIETY
OF QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll reconvene the committee. Before we ask our presenters in the 4 o'clock spot to present—as you can see, there are two representatives from each group that would like to make deputations. You may recall that the order of the House indicated we would have one person in person and then the rest via Zoom. I just need to have consent of the committee for us to proceed with the four speakers as presented to us. Are there any objections? Seeing no objections, we'll move forward.

I will call on the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs to go first—Scott and Zehavi, you'll have seven minutes—followed by the Alma Mater Society, and then we'll have the questions.

Go ahead and introduce yourself for Hansard and begin your presentation.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Thank you. Dear Mr. Chair, my name is Scott Goldstein, and I am the director of university relations with the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, also known as CIJA. CIJA is the advocacy agent for Canada's Jewish federations and a community of over 150,000 Canadian Jewish voices. I am honoured to have the opportunity to present to Ontario's Standing Committee on Social Policy about Ontario Bill 166, the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024.

The prevalence of anti-Semitism, particularly on post-secondary campuses, has been a growing problem for over a decade and an increasingly urgent issue that demands action. Ontario's universities should be bastions of free thought, open dialogue and diverse perspectives. Yet, re-

grettably, Jewish students and faculty often find themselves targeted, marginalized and even threatened due to their ethnic, religious and cultural identity. In fact, I regularly hear from our student partner organizations and students themselves about anti-Semitic incidents on campus, yet because of the current patchwork of provisions, we don't have a clear understanding of the problem nor about other hate incidents, including racism, homophobia and Islamophobia.

In the early 2000s, on a small northern Ontario campus, I was verbally assaulted simply because I was visibly identifiable as Jewish. That experience was a crucial factor in my pivot into Jewish advocacy. For over a decade since that incident, I've led Jewish student clubs, directed Hillels on several campuses, and I now manage university relations for our organized community on a provincial and national level. I've seen a lot through the lens of Jewish campus life.

One thing I am certain of is that the current system to prevent and address incidents of anti-Semitism is not working. Even when formal complaints are made—something that takes courage to bring forward—students and faculty face a complicated system to navigate. Complaints are rarely handled in a timely manner. Many reporting systems lack transparency, often with no clear mechanism for appeals. And post-secondary institutions themselves lack accountability for enforcing their own policies.

Mr. Chair, there is a long history of anti-Semitism on campuses in our province, and I have witnessed a concerning rise over the years. We are seeing hate symbols such as swastikas defacing campus property; discriminatory remarks in lectures claiming Jews harvest the organs or blood of non-Jews; mezuzahs, which are holy Jewish scriptural parchment housed in distinctive cases affixed to doorposts, being torn down in residences; and even barefaced threats of violence against Jewish students.

Since the atrocities of October 7, Jewish students and faculty have been subjected to a hostile environment with toxicity that destabilizes their sense of safety and belonging on campus. Student unions and educators on Ontario campuses have made statements supporting violence and discrimination. We've witnessed campus protests disguised as legitimate forms of political activism turn into riots while spreading hateful and violent rhetoric directed towards Jews, as they robbed students of their educational rights and professors of their teaching commitments.

Let me be clear: Academic freedom and freedom of expression are pillars of our campus values, but when lines are crossed and policies are not enforced, it shakes the trust our community has in the system.

Students and faculty shared with me that they avoid reporting incidents due to fear of retribution by their professors or peers. When reports are made about potential safety concerns, we've heard of several instances where Jewish students and faculty were advised to stay home rather than address the root of the matter. We've listened to claims from some campuses that there is no rise in anti-Semitism, according to their records, but we see it and know it is happening.

It is evident that proactive measures are necessary to combat anti-Semitism and safeguard the rights and well-being of Jewish students and faculty on Ontario campuses.

I want to leave you with some key messages from the Jewish campus community that we trust the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act can help address:

(1) The campus hate incident reporting, investigation, and resolution process is inconsistent across post-secondary institutions in our province. Some of these systems lack transparency, leaving students confused and frustrated.

(2) There does not appear to be a consistent, reasonable, maximum time frame for adjudicating all hate complaints. Many cases are not resolved before one or more parties have graduated.

(3) There is no impartial appeals process or Ombuds-person to ensure accountability. Students have nowhere to turn when they encounter problems in the system.

(4) There is no transparent aggregate of incident reports to ensure data-informed decisions are made while creating, updating, implementing and evaluating effective anti-hate strategies across our province.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute left.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Lastly, when implementing legislation, policies, programs and other initiatives to address hate on campus, please consult with and listen to mainstream Jewish voices that represent the majority of our community. By considering these systemic challenges in the implementation of this bill, the government and the Legislature would send a clear message that hate has no place in our educational institutions and that those who perpetrate it will be held accountable.

I would like to thank the minister for bringing forward this needed legislation, and I thank you, Mr. Chair and the members of the committee, for your time and consideration on these crucial matters.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

I will now ask the Alma Mater Society of Queen's University to begin your seven-minute presentation. Just make sure you introduce yourself in the mike for the purposes of Hansard.

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Good afternoon, standing committee. My name is Julian Mollot-Hill, and thank you for allowing us to appear in front of you today to speak to the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024.

As the commissioner of external affairs and the vice-president of university affairs at the Alma Mater Society of Queen's University, we represent 22,000 of our undergraduate peers to all three levels of government. The both of us additionally serve as board members for the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, or OUSA, whom you will be hearing from over the duration of these committee meetings.

Whilst we echo their sentiments, we bring forward additional insights from our home institution to fortify what is a critical step forward in addressing barriers to post-secondary education. So we have a few points towards the bill.

(1) Bill 166 should explicitly prohibit the withholding of funding to ensure compliance of institutions. In the case

of non-compliance for a college or a university, it is our recommendation that the bill be more forthcoming about measures that may be enacted as a result. Institutions like our own are facing grave operating deficits and are in the process of long-term strategic planning. Amidst this parallel financial crisis across Ontario post-secondary institutions, propagated with students contributing two thirds of operating expenses, we would be averse to financial penalties of any kind.

Coming from Queen's University specifically, which you may have seen as dealing with especially severe budgetary issues, the withholding of funding, even a relatively minor portion due to non-compliance, may have dire consequences sweeping across the school. Compliance needs to be assured, but in this precarious time for the financial health of institutions, avenues that do not rely on withholding funding should be investigated. These can include financial incentives or even public naming and shaming of non-compliant institutions, but within the language of the bill it should be made explicit that the withholding of funds is prohibited

(2) Institutions' mental health policy should consider community resources. Pursuant to section 2 content of the student mental health policy section—which says, "Every college or university described in subsection (1) shall have a student mental health policy that describes the programs, policies, services and supports available at the college or university in respect of student mental health." When institutions create or revisit their mental health policies in light of this bill, it's our recommendation they should be required to incorporate information on the resources available to students in the broader communities that they live in rather than just on-campus resources.

Although this bill is a great step towards improving and formalizing institutions' mental health response in support of capabilities, the reality is that institutions are under-equipped to be the sole support system for students. For universities that already have forms of mental health policy, the reality on campus is that these written policies are often immaterial in the face of materially underfunded and under-equipped on-campus support networks. For example, at Queen's University, the student wellness services wait times for an appointment range in the weeks, and the only emergency crisis support that exists is campus security and emergency services.

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The creation of policy that helps integrate community support and resources available to students, or simply informs students on their local options, would help provide a whole-of-community approach that would be able to handle the strain of student needs. This kind of policy could also help give community support providers greater certainty about what kinds of cases the university will refer to community networks, allowing them to better allocate resources and improve efficiency of care.

Additional clarification for students on what is available in the community would also improve students' power to choose the care that is right for them rather than being siloed into options that are not appropriate to their specific

needs. As it stands, and from experience, community providers such as hospitals will often play a hot-potato game with students seeking care, where they refer students back to school resources or to other hospitals, and then those networks bounce them back and so on.

For example, at Queen's, there's no evening clinic for mental health support, and students are informally referred to hospitals if care is needed during later hours. This can cause frustration when dealing with students from community care providers, which may affect the quality of care and even town-and-gown relations in their communities. Clear and thorough policy on behalf of universities in this regard would go a long way to improving response.

Ms. Victoria Mills: Hi, my name is Victoria Mills. As Julian mentioned, I'm the vice-president, university affairs, for the AMS.

The latter two recommendations that we have deal with the anti-racism and anti-hate portion of Bill 166. The first recommendation we have is, within these anti-racism and anti-hate policies, there should be mandatory paid student consultation, with key emphasis on that word "paid." With the directive for post-secondary institutions to be developing policies and rules to combat racism and hate, we firmly believe that student voices should be centric to this conversation and the development of said policies.

Students who have lived experiences should advise and are invaluable towards the development in how to best support the student community. However, with this clause added, we also recommend that student consultants be paid for the work they do within their roles. There is a long-standing history of equity work, which is incredibly emotionally exhaustive, not being paid at respective institutions and within a variety of roles. We understand that there are developments within institutions right now to combat this sort of prevalent history. A recognition policy in our union has been established, which is being complemented by university policies, which ensures that racialized students, for their contributions in a professional capacity to either our union or the university, remain paid, and that's something we would like to see in the broader sense.

One example we're thinking of is, within the anti-Indigenous racism section of this policy, it would be incredibly invaluable to have Indigenous students who are representative of the traditional territories for which the post-secondary institution is situated on to contribute to these discussions to ensure that we are never treating any student as part of a marginalized community as part of a monolith. We're being very intentional about how these consultations go.

The last recommendation that we have is also in relation to the anti-racism and anti-hate policies, which is adding a new clause for crisis response. Post-secondary institutions should be remaining steadfast in ensuring their campuses are safe and inclusive environments for all of their students. As it stands, the current bill provides directives for institutions to articulate a meaningful framework in an ongoing norm; however, there should be specific carve outs to formalize any kind of response and procedures in the event of a crisis.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got one minute.

Ms. Victoria Mills: On our own campuses, as our colleagues to the left mentioned, there are rising cases of anti-Semitism, there are rising cases of anti-Palestinian racism, and we find our university is at a standstill when it comes to this crisis response. We do believe that we should be advocating for accelerated timelines on action, again, as my colleagues to the left mentioned. Institution to institution, this may vary, but the inclusion in the bill as a specific portion of what constitutes effective anti-racist and anti-hate policy would help our institutions and our student communities significantly.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you. We'll start round one of the questions with the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam, seven and a half minutes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to our presenters.

I'm just going to start with our representatives from the Alma Mater Society of Queen's University. There was an earlier presenter from the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. In particular, I had asked them whether or not, in their ecosystem, which is one that touches most of the major stakeholders within the post-secondary sector, they had been consulted regarding the bill before they saw the bill in its public form.

My question to you is: Do you know if any of the student organizations had ever been consulted about the bill before the bill became public?

Ms. Victoria Mills: At least at this point in time, I can say no. I meet with upper administration fairly frequently, and they had mentioned that the bill was coming into existence, I suppose, prior to its first reading. But as the effective representatives of the undergraduate student population, we were not made aware of the bill. We were actually informed of this opportunity through our connections at OUSA.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The way the Ontario Legislative Assembly works is that they would view this forum in this committee as consultation with the public. How accessible is this venue, this forum, this process to the students at Queen's University if this was their opportunity to provide input?

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Not particularly accessible in the broad sense. It is possible. Is it accessible? Not necessarily. I think it's one facet, for sure. It's an important facet. But there needs to be a much broader scope, in general, for accessibility.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: You did mention that you would like to see student input, especially further consultation and some form of payment. Obviously, that's not going to be a provision here today. So this doesn't meet the type of consultation and engagement that you would be looking for on behalf of the students that you represent. Is that a fair assessment?

Ms. Victoria Mills: Sorry, would you be able to repeat that one more time?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Is this process satisfactory to your students?

Ms. Victoria Mills: Is the process of consultation—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Here, in Queen's Park, on this day, through this process, without the payment that you've just suggested that needs to take place.

Ms. Victoria Mills: With specific reference to the payment—actually, I’ll retract. I believe, in terms of the representation of our students to Queen’s Park, as much as we try to be the best advocates we can on behalf of 22,000 people, we do believe that for specific policies that are going to address anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, we identify with none of these key four pieces. Even though I was elected and Julian was hired and we do our absolute best to centralize what we see to be problems and consolidate student input and student voices and everything that we’ve been hearing over the course of our terms, we believe that only having two representatives on behalf of an institution as large as ours perhaps is not enough.

I think when we go into paid consultations, more so the directive that we’re looking at is when our institutions are to develop these policies and, in doing so, when they are consulting with students at our home institutions and they have focus groups or whatever form this takes on, that is the format for which we would like to see our institutions have the directive to ensure that these student consultants are paid for their labour.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I’m just going to pivot a little bit. I need to ask you about mental health as it relates to students. My understanding from the Canadian Federation of Students is that that some of the biggest contributors to anxiety and depression amongst post-secondary students are financial stress and the fact that they’re literally going hungry. They’re hustling to make sure that their rents are paid. The second barrier to good mental health is the long wait-list to access mental health services. And then the third is just the lack of available resources. Does that track with what you’re hearing from your students on campus?

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Yes, absolutely—almost in that order precisely. School will always be stressful, so there’s an uncontrollable variable there, but there’s also the massive, affectable variable of financial strain in many different ways.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: When I have seen post-secondary institutions roll out climate surveys or surveys addressing sexual violence or around harassment or even mental health or just getting a sense of what students are needing, they tend to go out pretty broad and pretty wide, and that’s oftentimes to ensure that they are going to produce a report with recommendations that are directed toward success. How successful will this initiative, this piece of legislation be without the valuable input of students, faculty, including teaching assistants, or even the participation of universities and colleges?

Ms. Victoria Mills: If we’re comparing on metrics, without that input, I would say very much in comparison not. I think that having the input of various faculty members and every other individual, as you mentioned, really does speak to the current state of our campuses. As post-secondary institutions, we do have a lot in common. We think about food insecurity, and we know that our student-run food bank has seen drastic increases—almost exponential increases—in usage, and that’s a pattern seen across the

province. But there are also specific, I suppose, ailments, for lack of a better word, that do plague each of our campuses and impact us differently. So without their input, it would not be as effective as perhaps it could be.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I just have a minute and 45 seconds left. I’d like to turn to CIJA. Thank you for your presentation as well. With respect to the call and response when it comes to anti-harassment policies, anti-hate policies on campuses, what we have heard earlier is that most of the colleges and universities have some form of policy. But it’s really the investigation and oftentimes enforcement that seems to be somewhat lacking, or perhaps a complaint process not being clear, or perhaps nobody in the C-suite owns the policy. All of that leads to confusion on the ground.

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With respect to the minister coming up with their sort of missives to direct what a PSI can do or not do in the future, what specifically are you looking for—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Just one minute remaining.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Simply because you’re one of the few groups that have come forward to say, “We really like this piece of legislation.” You support it, so I’m just curious to know: What exactly do you think the minister is going to issue as a directive to PSIs when it comes to the anti-hate policy?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Very briefly, thank you for that excellent question. I can’t comment to what the directive will be. I do know that—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: What do you hope to see at least?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: What I’m hoping to see is anything that will help our institutions review policies and enforce policies to ensure that things like anti-Semitism and other forms of hate on our campus are addressed. That is the key message we’re coming here today with. And we’ll support in consultation and conversation to see how that will be implemented.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Are you concerned that there is not more clarity, because it’s left rather—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We’ll now move to MPP Clancy. You’ve got the next round of questioning for four and a half minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I’ll start with checking in with CIJA. I think we all can say that the response to hate declarations or complaints has been inconsistent across different universities. I guess the concern I have is that a policy won’t necessarily change that without funding to go alongside that. When you think about the actions that need to be taken to make this policy actually function well, what do you see being needed?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I’ll be honest, I can’t comment on that because I actually don’t know. I’ll have to defer to the minister. It’s just not an area of my expertise. I can speak to the issues of anti-Semitism, but beyond that, I don’t feel comfortable commenting.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: It sounded like you might want somebody to take that concern, maybe by phone or by email,

that you might want somebody who works and is paid by the university to look into the concerns so that they can investigate: Is this a plausible threat? Was there something that needs to be escalated?

I guess, when I think about a hate policy on paper versus one in action that actually performs really well, that you really want highly trained and skilled staff, that you want to make sure that maybe stakeholders across the campus have—that we're raising all boats to understand any risk that there might be, to understand the difference between having a heated debate and being critical versus a hate incident or a hate crime, and when do we involve police and when don't we. All of these things, I think, require staff. So that, I guess, was my hope.

I don't know if you've seen campuses that are doing a good job of this that you can speak to the investments and the funding that's gone into making sure that appropriate action can be taken.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I appreciate that concern and the question, obviously. I do know that all the institutions I have interacted with in Ontario and even beyond have some of these things in place. I can only comment to the toxic environment that exists on our campus due to, in part, how these systems are not necessarily as effective as we want them to be. So how they can be improved is really between the institutions and our government. I'm happy to consult in that process. But beyond that, I really can't say.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And were you—we ask this to everybody. Were you consulted before this bill was crafted?

Mr. Zehavi Zynoberg: I'll speak to that. We have been in consultation and in conversations with the minister's office to talk about the issue of anti-Semitism on campus as a whole for—before the last six months. Because of a lack of a system that actually adjudicates the problem in a timely manner, that was something that we wanted to see the government step in and ensure. In terms of our consultations, it's something that we always flagged and addressed with both the minister, with both the opposition and with all MPPs.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining—and can you just do me a favour? Just for Hansard purposes, can you just put your name into the record for me?

Mr. Zehavi Zynoberg: Sure. Zehavi Zynoberg.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

Do you want to continue with the answer?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I was going to add, if possible: Just about a year ago, I had the honour and privilege to join a group of students to share about their experiences, specifically on the reporting system, but anti-Semitism as a whole on campus. And we visited a number of MPPs, including MPP Sattler, who was very receptive to the concerns of the Jewish students on the rise of anti-Semitism. This was over just about a year ago, prior to October 7, so it's not a new issue. It's just being emphasized much more greatly at this time.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Okay, thank you.

How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Nine seconds.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: That's okay.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the government's first round of questioning, seven and a half minutes. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you for everyone being here today. This is a sensitive subject and I know it can be difficult and challenging.

I think we all agree, once again, that we all want the best circumstances for the students in our colleges and universities. You touched on something—and I think we can all also agree that post-October 7—hate existed prior, but now it's perhaps significantly larger. Not that we don't want a safe environment for everyone, but if we could focus on the statistics, because I find it interesting, and if this is possible: What's the percentage of Jewish students on campus in Ontario right now?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I don't have those numbers in front of me. I would say it's similar, if not slightly higher, than the average Ontario—

Ms. Laura Smith: Two to three per cent, right?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. And the average of anti-Semitic incidences against Jewish students?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I do not have statistics in front of me. That's part of the challenge, is that it's very hard to track because—

Ms. Laura Smith: Because it's not recorded, because it never happens.

So, you talked about the incidences, and I found it particularly interesting. You talked about the mezuzahs. It's interesting because—and just to clarify, if you could explain what a mezuzah is.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Sure. There is a Jewish tradition; it's cultural and religious, so even those who are not practising the religious aspects of the Jewish people will still put up a mezuzah, which is scriptural text written on a—what's the word?

Mr. Zehavi Zynoberg: The doorpost.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: No, but the—it's a scroll, a special scroll, and placed inside of a case to protect it and it's put on the doorpost to symbolize—it's for protection, traditionally, but it's also symbolizing Jewishness.

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes, so if you're a Jewish student, you would put that mezuzah on your door.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: That's interesting, because—would students feel like they're in a situation where they can put up these scrolls now, in light of the world that they're living in?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I think that's a very poignant question. I would say, prior to October 7, both when I was a Hillel director myself on campus and past that time, that there have been students who have come concerned: "Should I put this up? It's going to identify me as Jewish and maybe I shouldn't." And I've always encouraged them to do so. I would still encourage them to do so, but I have to couch that in a warning these days, which is a very sad situation to be in.

Ms. Laura Smith: And that's interesting, because I hear from constituents who actually go to Queen's and they

have taken down their mezuzahs in fear. So, this is a very sad circumstance. Obviously, they're hiding who they are for fear.

I'm wondering if you could tell us of any other circumstances of hate that have happened across the province on campus.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Thank you very much for that opportunity. I do know that some Jewish students will be here to speak before the committee and share their own experiences.

Some really important instances of hate that I've either witnessed or seen really relate to the anti-Semitic tropes that are very common in our society. I mentioned in my remarks that there was a class where the educator provided reading material, as well as part of the discussion in the class included the indication that Jews are harvesting the blood and organs of non-Jews.

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Ms. Laura Smith: Can I just stop you? This was instructed?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: This was part of the class conversation—

Ms. Laura Smith: The class conversation that was part of the educational process—

Mr. Scott Goldstein: That's correct.

Ms. Laura Smith: —that parents and grandparents and children—sorry, I'm over 30; I'm calling everyone children—and students are paying for, which is documented. That's unfortunate.

I'm going to move forward. Given everything that you've described and what you've gone to, what kind of supports are you providing at this time for the students who come into your offices, or virtually, or through the—

Mr. Scott Goldstein: That's an excellent question.

You heard from Rabbi Seth Goren earlier about Hillel's support system that exists. As CIJA, we are mandated to work with senior administration at universities across Canada, especially here in Ontario, while Hillel is the one who deals directly with students for the majority of the time. I do interact with students occasionally, and that's where I've heard these direct reports, but Hillel is the first address for Jewish students who are experiencing hate on campus to go to—obviously, beyond the security, if there's an immediate threat.

Ms. Laura Smith: So I imagine the first point of contact is from a parent who's quite upset?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Yes. We hear from parents quite regularly, and there's quite a bit of frustration around that.

Ms. Laura Smith: I know you couldn't provide any statistics, because hate, once again, is not actually properly documented on our universities and campuses, but how would you say the incidences of hate that you've experienced through the parents of those students have increased post-October 7?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I would say that it is significantly increased in the past—

Ms. Laura Smith: Two, three times more?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Much more than that. The number that Hillel Ontario has provided of a nine times increase is

one that I would agree with in terms with of my experience with—

Ms. Laura Smith: So let's be very concise: 2% to 3% of the population of Ontario, which would be reflected on university campuses, is now subject to nine times the amount of hate—and that's not to take away from anybody else's disturbances. We all want a peaceful environment for our students.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Laura Smith: But they are actually obtaining a significantly larger portion of that hate.

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I would agree. That's correct.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. I'm going to pass my time over to MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Scott, can you talk a little bit, please, about what more colleges and universities can be doing to ensure faculty can work and teach in an environment that's safe, respectful and conducive to their success?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: That's an excellent question.

I do know that this committee will be hearing from Jewish faculty representatives, but if it were up to me, I would say that our universities need to listen to the faculties, especially those who come from the mainstream community organizations that represent the majority of Jewish individuals on- and off-campus, as well as receive effective training on—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We're going to move to the official opposition for a seven-and-a-half-minute round. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I apologize that I wasn't present for the presentation, but I did hear you, Scott, refer to the meeting that we held last year, which was very helpful. There were students from Hillel Western who talked about their own experiences of anti-Semitism on campus. One of the focuses of our conversation was around the need for an anonymous reporting mechanism on campus for students to safely report incidents of hate without fearing retribution, and I think that would be helpful all around, but this bill doesn't talk about that. This bill talks about university and college campuses having to have a policy on racism and hate that is developed through a directive from the minister. How are you seeing the need for some kind of anonymous reporting on campus for students to report, to disclose incidents of racism and hate—how are you seeing that piece reflected in this bill?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Thank you for that excellent question. My initial response would really revolve around the idea that improving policies where they exist and creating them where they don't will be able to, through that creation and evaluation process, identify the challenges specifically around the concerns that Jewish students and, I'm sure, other students have around the potential retribution and other things that make it so hard for students to come forward for various fears—that that will be identified in the process and will include in that policy, in the process, other forms of implementation on our campuses in Ontario to ensure that that is addressed.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes, but we don't know that. This sort of gives carte blanche to the minister to determine whatever's going to be in the policy.

The other concern I have is that, obviously, to develop some kind of anonymous reporting mechanism on campuses across the province would require resources, not just on the development but also the follow-up—staff resources, infrastructure resources. I think the students from Queen’s—I’m guessing that, in their presentation, they probably talked about the chronic underfunding of post-secondary institutions. Is that a concern that you have, that to put these requirements in place but not to provide any kinds of adequate resources to operationalize them is going to be a problem?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: I appreciate the clarification. My understanding, at least at the institutions I’ve engaged with, is that many of these resources are already available. That’s why the key message that I bring today revolves around accountability and ensuring that these policies are enforced and followed through on, and that the various mechanisms that are either already in place or will be in place will be effective in both preventing but also addressing incidents of anti-Semitism.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay.

I’m turning it to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Can I just get a time check?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): It’s 3:45.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much.

Just coming back to our friends from Queen’s University, I really want to be able to dig a little bit deeper around mental health supports because I think it’s such a critical issue for so many as we know it right now in the campus environment. My question is specifically around the type of supports you do want to see. My last question to you was whether or not this bill will be very successful without the involvement and the consultation with students. We know that the bill is not perfect, but what can the government do to improve the bill? Because we’re at the committee process; we can change it. There’s edits to be made, if they accept it. But what do you want to see in the bill?

Ms. Victoria Mills: For sure. I think, to address the first part of that question—it actually was just touched on a little bit ago—having a policy that supports mental health and outlines the supports that institutions have is fantastic, but it is nothing without resources backing it.

Right now, we’re seeing, on our campus alone—we don’t have an evening clinic. If you are undergoing a crisis at 10 p.m. at night in your residence dorm room, your options are to call—there are a number of hotlines. There is that, but there’s not that kind of personal aspect unless you’re calling campus security or emergency services or you’re going directly down to a hospital network that, oftentimes, is actually ill-equipped to take you. I worked in the hospital network in Kingston, Ontario, and I can speak to just how understaffed and under-resourced they are.

So I think that one thing we would like to see is, with these directives to develop a mental health policy, we also need the resources to ensure that the mechanisms that you’re including in this policy are actually translating into that service for students. So we would need that funding aspect there because, again, on our campuses, we are under-

staffed, we are underfunded, and that is exactly what’s correlating to higher wait times and other detriments to students’ mental health.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The government is putting aside \$8 million over three years to address mental health on campuses, and that’s spread across 47 post-secondary institutions. The math breaks down to \$57,000 per institution. Is that enough to meet the intention of the bill?

1640

Ms. Victoria Mills: No.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: No. Can you say that a little bit louder?

Ms. Victoria Mills: No. No, it’s not.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: So it doesn’t meet the bill, or at least what the minister says that the bill should do. So how do we square this? Because we have a government that talks about improving the climate for learning, that student health and well-being is a priority, but yet we see just the lack of support in mental health supports.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: I think, to start with, when we say “student feedback and consultation,” it’s often very broad speaking or always, “Oh, ask us this; ask us that.” But in the case of mental health supports, it very much is utterly imperative that there is a student audit about just what it’s like to actually be, “I am in mental health crisis” or “I have a chronic mental health problem. Seeking help, what can I get and what is available at every institution?” And then seeing the gaps and, from there, building on plugging those gaps, building on expanding on what works and then also providing funding. Everything does start from seeing the processes as they happen, because right now it’s very, very siloed, very, very fragmented, and very different from institution to institution, which ideally this bill addresses, but it doesn’t seem to have the capabilities to do so.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you.

A few seconds left?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Nine seconds.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay. Thank you very much, everyone, for your presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

MPP Clancy, your final round of questions: four and a half minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for AMS. I know Queen’s has been in the media about having funding shortages. How does that make you feel when you’re a student there?

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Not great—it really just goes to show it’s kind of the canary in the coal mine, to an extent. It was a series of circumstances. Obviously they are doing much worse than other institutions. The Queen’s situation is somewhat of its own creation, but it’s just more a canary for the broader spectrum of post-secondary in the province.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So maybe that’s a little source of stress too, right? Sorry, with all compassion for that.

Part of this bill gives the minister the ability to make directives. That means we don’t know what those directives might be, so that’s one curiosity that’s there. And we know that the minister, I think, has good intentions, and

they've talked to a lot of students, but isn't a mental health professional, hasn't consulted with mental health professionals and isn't an anti-hate professional. So how does that feel, when that is the scenario we're creating right now?

Ms. Victoria Mills: I think when you have that degree of ambiguity across post-secondary institutions that are fundamentally very different and who fundamentally are there to serve student populations that are very diverse and with diverse needs, having a blanket with specific directives, taking out that integral student consultation bit, again, it does not serve the purpose for which it was initially intended.

I know that, after speaking to university administration, I think some of the same concerns arose with the last policy on redoing university policies around sexual misconduct and sexual violence, I think it was as well. I think that if we're leaving institutions in the dark with very vague directives and very blanket directives, then that doesn't really guide that consultation process as well as perhaps it should be, and then you're kind of seeing this domino effect to that subsequent policy from this directive not serving that purpose. That's where, again, we see this disconnect.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: It sounds like, while we understand that these things should be required on all campuses, you want a bit more clarity, maybe, is that fair to say, on how to look?

Ms. Victoria Mills: Fair to say.

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Yes, 100%. Part of this bill very much leaves a lot to the imagination in terms of what functionally—it gives the minister a lot of powers to implement some sort of directives, but those directives I think should be stated more forthcomingly.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And when you think of what mental health services should look like on your campus—I know, as a mental health professional, I see so many gaps, especially when it comes to who is responding in a crisis and what their capacities are. What is the response from the university when you ask them about getting more supports for students?

Ms. Victoria Mills: There are constraints. Don't quote me directly, but Queen's, with the situation that it's in and with the operating deficit that it's in—a lot of departments are under a hiring freeze, for instance, and it's very difficult. Upper administration does understand the need for more mental health professionals, but then it becomes a question of capacity. It becomes a question of funding.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Victoria Mills: As much as there is progress and advancement toward that, the advancements that we are seeing are simply not enough to meet the demand of the current student population—a student population that is going to be growing and that is ever-changing and is going to need mental health professionals who reflect that evolution, in a sense.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you so much for coming today to all those who joined us.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the government: final round, seven and a half minutes. MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Mr. Chair, through you to AMS: Good to see you. I like to see young people here—makes me feels younger.

As a parent paying for my child's post-secondary student fees, I think generating more transparency for student fees is a great idea. Bill 166, if passed, would make great strides in ensuring students have a clear and transparent picture of how your hard-earned tuition dollars are spent. Do you agree that this is a good thing for students? And as a follow-up, do you believe that increasing fees on students without their knowledge or their voice in the matter needs to be addressed?

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Yes, 100%, absolutely. Transparency is necessary, and that's something—we take a student fee, and we strive every day for extreme transparency in what we use that money for, in every specific budget line. We think that it's imperative that institutions do the same. So yes, 100%, we are in support of that.

Mr. Billy Pang: To what spectrum and what types of transparency are you looking for?

Ms. Victoria Mills: There are student fees which, to my understanding, do increase per annum with the CPI indicator. I think that as long as students are understanding, as Julian mentioned, where this money is going—because I think when a lot of us pay our student fees, it's lumped in with tuition. There isn't as much segregation almost, and you can't really differentiate as much which fee is going toward what. Oftentimes, it's presented in a manner to you that is a little bit inaccessible. Because certain fees are mandatory, we just think, "Well, okay, sure." But there isn't really as much of that budgetary breakdown and that financial transparency as we would see.

Again, to my understanding, this may vary across different institutions. Certain fees may increase a certain year but only by a certain percentage, or perhaps they're not able to unless they go to referendum, which is something that a lot of student unions undertake, so I think understanding that fee structure as well.

And to your point earlier, there shouldn't be any—institutions should be forthcoming about any costs that are subject to increase.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I concur with my colleague: It's always great to see young people here too so that we can ensure that young people's voices are heard by all of us.

My questions will be for Queen's University. We're talking a lot about mental health. Mental health is health, and so access to mental health supports on campuses is vital. But I did want to state for the record that this year, the government is investing a total of \$32.1 million in mental health supports for post-secondary students. This includes a Mental Health Services Grant; Mental Health Worker Grant; Indigenous Institutes Mental Health Grant; Good2Talk app, a free, 24/7 mental help line for students; Get A-Head, a virtual, app-based mental health service; and there are other measures.

I was just wondering, in terms of the Good2Talk app or other online tools that are available to students, is that something that your club is promoting to the use of the students that you represent?

Ms. Victoria Mills: Yes. Just, I suppose, for the record: student union, not a club, but—

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Oh, sorry. My apologies.

Ms. Victoria Mills: A little bit larger. But yes, absolutely. Good2Talk is actually something that's promoted through the institution, and there are a variety of crisis lines that are either very general or for specific instances. I think of sexual violence, for instance; that has its own crisis line that is 24/7 that is promoted to students.

Within our student union as well, parallel to many others, we also do offer a health and dental plan. Within, that also has mental health supports. Those are things that we also offer to students because do have a quite high opt-in rate for the undergraduate students for which we represent. In addition, our student union, we offer a peer-support centre that has two branches called BIPOC Talk and Queers 4 Peers, and those are heavily utilized by students.

So absolutely, we do promote those. But again, with post-secondary institutions and the ways in which they operate, and to Julian's point earlier, with a lot of mental health supports, it is a little bit fragmented, and almost too fragmented. It is hard for students, especially those new students, those first-year students, to understand what the supports are that are available to them because there is this kind of lack of centralization, I suppose, and especially this disconnect with the community.

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Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Speaking of those first-year students, the freshmen coming onto the campus, they're excited to be there but also shy. Can you tell us what your union is doing to promote the different services that are available, especially mental health? There is still a certain level of stigmatization when it comes to accessing mental health support. Are there any initiatives, specifically, that your union has done to say, "No, it's okay to access these services; you don't have to suffer alone"?

Ms. Victoria Mills: Absolutely. The way in which the Queen's University orientation works is a little bit different than other schools. A lot of that outreach is done by our faculty societies. Queen's University hosts the largest student-run faculty orientations in the country.

We're very, very proud of that and almost every single faculty has events, has specific talks or even this time set aside to make students aware of the resources that are available to them on and off campus, not only for mental health but just in a more general sense, whether that be, again, for mental health, physical health, whether that be for academics. These are, as well, directives at our union because we are—I oversee the oversight body, if that makes sense, for orientation. So these are things that we actively encourage folks to do.

Through the event planning and approvals process for orientation, there are very specific goals that come down

from our senate orientation review committee that do reflect these aspects that you are talking about. We do that cross-referencing to ensure that the orientation events are meeting these goals. Then, I suppose, in addition to that, on the union front, we do a lot of first-year outreach to promote the resources that are particularly housed within us, say for the health and dental insurance that you can opt in to and the peer support centre, as I had mentioned earlier. We do that through resource kits, we do that through talks, and we do that through residence and a variety of other things, so yes.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute left.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I did want to ask a quick question to CIJA. So my background is Polish, and we have a shared history with Poland, of course. I recently visited, with my Egyptian husband, the Auschwitz concentration camp. That's a place of evil, and it certainly had an impact on both my husband and I.

Today we're discussing hate. More broadly speaking, what more can colleges and universities do to ensure that hate in all its forms is condemned?

Mr. Scott Goldstein: Thank you very much for that question and for sharing about your experience. I believe that our institutions will be able to, through this bill, and through other efforts, improve on what they're already doing to help address hate.

If I were to speak specifically about anti-Semitism—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'm sorry. We're out of time for the government's spot. I want to thank both groups today for appearing before the committee. We appreciated your response.

I'm going to go off my script a little bit. Some of the colleagues talked about young voices. Julian and I had that same hairdo back in my younger days, and I really miss it. So it was nice to see that, to bring back old memories.

Mr. Julian Mollot-Hill: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Have a great day. Thank you.

Committee members, we are running about six minutes ahead of schedule, but we do have all three of our presenters here. With your indulgence, if there are no objections, we'll ask our next three presenters to come forward. Is that acceptable to the committee? Okay, thank you.

MS. SAMANTHA KLINE

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL
AT WESTERN ONTARIO

MS. LAURA BARKEL

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks for being here today. Each of you will have seven minutes to present to the committee, followed by two rounds of questioning from the members of provincial Parliament. Your order of speaking is the same as what's on the sheet. If you don't have it in front of you, Samantha Kline will go first, followed by Emily Poirier from the University Students' Council, followed by Laura Barkel.

So, I'll call on Samantha first. Just at the very start of your presentation, just introduce yourself into the mike for the purpose of Hansard. Go ahead.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Hi. My name is Samantha Kline, and I'm a student.

I'm a student at OCAD University, and throughout my time at university, I've been confronted with harsh cases of anti-Semitism perpetuated by students, faculty and even the administration.

Anti-Semitism on campus was already an issue, but since October 7, it has significantly intensified. Every report I had made before October 7 had either been delayed or stalled, which left me feeling that anti-Semitism was not being addressed and that it wasn't a priority for OCAD.

It's clear the current policies fail to address the hatred towards Jews. When I reached out to the office of diversity, equity and inclusivity for assistance over two years ago, hoping to find support for Jewish students, I quickly became disappointed and frustrated. Despite the numerous attempts to engage with them and raise awareness about the issues Jewish students were facing, my and my peers' emails were ignored and there was a refusal to comment on the matter. This lack of acknowledgement not only invalidated the experiences of Jewish students but also perpetuated a culture of neglect within the university's administration. This failure to respond effectively to anti-Semitism not only endangered my safety but also contributed to a broader culture of fear and intimidation on campus. The lack of proactive measures to combat anti-Semitism further exacerbated feelings of vulnerability and isolation among Jewish students, who found themselves abandoned by an institution that promised to value diversity and inclusivity.

For the past few years, the stairwell at my school has been a constant source of concern for me. Initially, it was meant to be a vibrant space adorned with student murals and poems, serving as an inspiring backdrop for daily passage. However, over time, this vision has drastically changed, and the stairwell has become a breeding ground for hate and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Instead of fostering creativity and positivity, it now is a toxic atmosphere tainted by hateful messages.

On February 8, 2024, the anti-Semitic messages on my school stairwell became intolerable, with phrases such as "F Zionist," "Israel is a terrorist country," "@Jews when's the sale," and "Jews, go kill yourself." The environment became unbearable for daily passage. Despite numerous reports and complaints about the anti-Semitic content plastered on the walls, the university has failed to take any meaningful action. Even after several calls to the police, the situation remains unresolved, as the jurisdiction falls within the university's domain.

In response, I took it upon myself to paint peaceful messages like "Peace is free," "Peace starts with you," "Our love is stronger than your hate" and "End anti-Semitism." When people found out about this, I received backlash. On Monday, February 12, I received photos of graffiti with death threats targeting me. The staircase of my university was adorned with messages like "death," followed

by my name, "I'm going to kill you" and threats of sexual assault targeting my mother, referring to Hamas, along with numerous other disturbing messages, all directed at me. That shattered any semblance of safety or belonging that I once had felt at school. I turned to my school for help, and I received little to no support. The institution's policies had once again failed to protect me.

When I reported the incident, no meaningful action was taken. They painted over the threats after a week of them staying up and made no policies against them, leading to more anti-Semitism being written on the wall. To this date, the stairwell is filled with hateful anti-Semitic rhetoric that the police have shared concerns over with my university. There continues to be no support for me regarding policies, and other students have then been harassed for being Jewish on campus.

The absence of policies to address such behaviour has allowed this toxic environment to persist, casting a dark shadow over what was once a space filled with artistic expression. The lack of repercussions for those who engage in anti-Semitic behaviour allows others to perpetuate hate, creating an environment where bullying and discrimination thrive unchecked.

This incident is not isolated. In the past, I had to walk with private security due to a threat from a student prompted by my distribution of kosher food for Passover on campus. Unable to tolerate the anti-Semitism at my school any longer, I've been forced to stay away from school and do my work from home out of fear for my life.

In addition to this, a few days ago, walking home from Hillel on the University of Toronto campus, I was deeply disturbed when someone hurled the derogatory term "kike" to me. It was a stark reminder of the lingering prejudice that still exists, even on campuses that aren't mine.

Even more troubling is the apparent lack of repercussions for such behaviour. Following October 7, students seem aware of this impunity and exploit it to target others. It's alarming that university campuses, which should be places for learning and inclusivity, can resemble the oppressive atmosphere of historical periods such as pre-war Germany.

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In conclusion, the Jewish experience on campus underscores the failure of institutions to protect students from bigotry and discrimination. Despite escalating levels of anti-Semitism perpetuated by various university members, including students, faculty and administration, Jewish students find themselves abandoned by a system that neglects their safety and their well-being.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

We'll now move to the University Students' Council. Do you want to introduce yourself into Hansard?

Ms. Emily Poirier: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Emily Poirier. I'm the vice-president, external affairs, of the University Students' Council at Western University, also known as the USC. The USC represents the interests and concerns of over 36,000 undergraduate students at Western to university administration and all three levels of government. We are also proud members of the Ontario

Undergraduate Student Alliance, who spoke before the committee earlier today.

We would like to echo the sentiments and recommendations made by OUSA, as well as bring forward additional recommendations. Above all, I would like to underline that this is a step in the right direction for Ontario students, and we hope to continue to work to make this legislation the best it can be for those we represent.

In particular, I would like to reiterate OUSAs recommendations on the importance of reviewing the policies on racism and hate, as well as student mental health, every two years instead of the proposed five, ensuring students and their representative bodies are consulted and active participants within these reviews as well as ensuring that compliance is upheld through non-financial penalties. These amendments would allow for the resulting policies to be responsive to student needs and the evolving landscape of post-secondary education while ensuring that institutions have the resources to address these issues effectively.

With respect to the content of ministerial directives outlining the contents of policies against racism and hate, the USC urges the minister to require institutions to include the following information: the reporting processes for incidents of racism and hate; the maximum timelines for investigations of complaints; the accommodations available to students subject to incidents of hate; and the appeals process following adjudication of complaints.

In respect to the content of ministerial directives outlined in the contents of policies regarding student mental health, the USC urges the administrator require institutions to include the following information: the accommodation process and required documentation for short-term mental health support; the accommodation process and required documentation for long-term mental health and disability support; and the supports available to students on campus and in crisis supports in the larger community.

By including this information within these policies, students, staff and faculty will be more easily able to understand their rights and responsibilities without having to consult multiple policies. It will also reduce the chances of conflicting policies, as rules and regulations will all be laid out in one document. It will also set a minimum standard to which the province will be able hold institutions accountable in order to protect students.

Additionally, the USC believes it is key to make training available to all members of the campus community, including administration, staff, faculty and students, on the processes outlined in order to better support students. If the campus community does not know what the policies surrounding reporting are, they are not able to be effectively used. By providing optional training, as is done for gender-based and sexual violence policies, more individuals will be able to direct students in need to the appropriate offices.

Finally, with regard to the annual reports to the board of governors in terms of the implementation of the above policies, the USC believes that having more information around the instances reported of hate as well alongside the implementation process will allow for more transparency

for the campus community as well as the minister's office to better implement policies.

In conclusion, I'm happy to take questions about any of these recommendations.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you for your presentation.

I'll now ask our third presenter to state your name prior to your presentation for the purpose of Hansard. You can begin.

Ms. Laura Barkel: My name is Laura Barkel. I just wanted to start by thanking you all for being here today and listening to my story. I'm currently in my final year, or tomorrow will be done my final year, at Toronto Metropolitan University—thank you, thank you. I'm also Jewish, Canadian and Israeli.

Last year was my first year on campus because I started during COVID, and, up until October 7, I had been fortunate enough not to have to encounter anti-Semitism firsthand. The instances of anti-Semitism I've encountered, though, since October 7 have been nothing short of disturbing, leaving an enduring impact not only on me but the entire Jewish community. It's crucial to know that these incidents aren't isolated occurrences, but symptomatic of systemic issues deeply ingrained in society.

While policies against discrimination exist on campus, they aren't sufficient in addressing the pervasive nature of anti-Semitism. Despite reporting various incidents, the response from campus authorities has been disappointing, revealing broken systems and a lack of genuine commitment to combatting anti-Semitism.

The first protest that occurred on my campus the week following October 7 featured posters that made me and other Jewish students feel unsafe. During the protest, I was abruptly confronted by a fellow TMU student who grabbed my arm, yanked me back and launched with an outburst of vile, anti-Semitic slurs. He said to me, "It's too bad Hitler didn't finish his job, or you and your family would all be dead." This incident wasn't just an attack on me as an individual, but an attack on my heritage and my history.

The week following that protest, I found myself in another distressing encounter during an interview for the media about being Jewish on campus. It took place on the main pedestrian street of my school. Without any provocation, a woman approached me. Before I could react, she spat in my face and yelled, "Get out of here. You don't belong here, you dirty Jew," and then wielded her book as a weapon, struck me on the cheek, and forcibly pushed me off the sidewalk. The attack left me reeling with shock, anger and disbelief, reinforcing the reality of anti-Semitism in our society. When I reported the incident to security, they directed me to student support services. However, I never received any follow-up from them, and the individual responsible continued to be on campus every day.

Feeling abandoned by my institution, I started sharing my experience in person and online. I hoped to shed light on the severity of this issue and encourage others to stand up as well; instead, I became circulated online as the devil of it all. Online harassment from peers and classmates had become disturbingly common, with death threats, graphic images, derogatory comments and threats of assault flooding

my social media and email inboxes every day. And this was not just confined to the digital world. People at school yell at me, calling me a genocide supporter and the Zionist of TMU. This idea also circulated online, with photos of me and circles around my face and Xs over my face with captions like, “Oh, no, it’s the TMU Zionist again,” and, more worryingly, “Find the TMU Zionist,” and “If I see the Zionist again, I’m going to catch assault charges.”

Using “Zionist” as a derogatory term fosters a hostile environment. The misuse perpetuates stereotypes, inciting hostility and even violence towards Jewish individuals. It’s deeply troubling and underscores the need to respect diverse beliefs without resorting to derogatory labels or violence.

The rise of subtler forms of anti-Semitism masquerading as legitimate criticism of Israel has unfortunately become normalized and accepted on campus when it specifically targets Jews. This normalization also creates an environment where targeted individuals based on their identities don’t report as often due to fear of backlash or dismissal. I felt this myself—a lack of institutional trust and a fear of reporting because of the lack of care and action that I would receive. It’s deeply troubling that anti-Semitic attitudes and actions are gaining acceptance, creating an environment where Jewish students feel increasingly vulnerable and marginalized.

Despite contacting campus authorities for support multiple times, the response has been continuously disappointing. Instead of addressing the root causes of anti-Semitism and implementing concrete measures to combat it, I’ve been met with indifference and token gestures. The lack of adequate measures and reluctance to confront anti-Semitism head-on has left me questioning whether it’s worth risking my safety to engage in campus environments that fail to prioritize the well-being of all of its students, while making me question if I’m welcome there as a Jewish person or viewed as an open invitation to be attacked.

If that weren’t enough, the recent escalation of threats and harassment has pushed me to the brink. Last week, I was approached and followed by a man who identified me from social media through my recent activism fighting anti-Semitism. Later that day, I found out that he had been messaging me online for some time, stalking me and reposting images of me. He had been studying me, knowing what I look like and who my friends were, all because I am Jewish and support Israel. I can’t say much more because it is a police matter, but it has caused me great anxiety and distress—even being here today.

Recently, friends have even expressed fear and hesitancy to walk with me on campus. They’re concerned about being recorded publicly and shared, as I am, often, and they fear that they would become targets of the same abuse. The label “genocide supporter” has been unjustly assigned to me and has cast a shadow over them and the rest of the community on my campus, as well. Nobody feels safe being who they are and knowing that they probably aren’t protected in this environment.

This whole experience underscores the urgent need for action. We can’t ignore the reality of anti-Semitism, both blatant and subtle, that exists and thrives on campus.

Facing anti-Semitism on campus has deeply affected me, causing mental distress and souring my university experience. Being targeted and attacked for my identity has been incredibly traumatic, leading to dread and even a sense of hatred towards attending school, a place where I should feel safe and eager to be. The fear of being recognized and subjected to further hostility, coupled with sleepless nights, has made each day an outing that had to do with school an ordeal. Anti-Semitism has not only marred my educational journey but eroded my sense of security—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You’ve got one minute.

Ms. Laura Barkel: Oh, just five more words—and belonging in the broader community. That’s it. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you very much.

We’ll now move to the round of questioning, and the first round will be from the independent member. She’ll have four and a half minutes for questions. MPP Clancy.

1710

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I’m so sorry to hear about the hate you’ve experienced on your campus and the assaults. I do hope we can invest in our campuses’ ability and do training, like was shared by USC, that we can do better.

My question is for you, Emily. When you think about how we need to raise all voices, you mentioned training. Can you elaborate on what would it look like to have an anti-oppressive lens across the campus?

Ms. Emily Poirier: Absolutely. I think what we’ve really been able to—I’ve really drawn on recommendations from the work that’s been done already in terms of gender-based violence on campus. So, in terms of having a policy in place where instructors actually know what the process looks like in terms of reporting, something that I’ve noticed since I’ve been in university—I started in 2019, which would have been after a lot of those amendments had been made in terms of gender-based violence—is that instructors will usually genuinely actually understand what the process is for approaching a disclosure or for reporting, which is huge, because if you are coming forward to an instructor or a peer, and you say, “Okay, this has happened to me,” and everyone says, “Okay, well, that’s terrible, but I don’t know what to do about that,” it creates a lot of burden on the person reporting to actually go through and find out that information, do the digging, which, considering it’s already a very emotionally difficult situation, makes people less likely to report.

So by making sure that that information is very readily available and that staff, faculty, other students, student leaders like myself have that information available so that we actually understand this is who you go to in case you wanted to make a report of racism or hate on campus, that really allows for it to be an open-door policy so that everyone is able to give the correct referrals.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. It sounds like a lot of work has to be done and investment made to make sure everybody is kind of on the same page. It sounds like, for Laura and Samantha as well, you would have appreciated a process that you knew and could count on to find some justice. To me, it sounds like a big investment.

I know a friend of mine started a program in England. They say, “Ask for Angela,” and anyone at a nightclub or a bar knows that if you’re asking for Angela, you’re not feeling safe, and then somebody who has that training—maybe I don’t know what that means or I don’t have the training, but it puts a network of allies out there on our campuses. So I hope that we can have the investment needed to make sure that when it comes to hate and mental health, we can take a multipronged approach and we have allies all across the campus.

I think I’m going to ask Samantha—I think you didn’t get a process to be able to speak up for the hate you experienced and get a process to make sure there was a proper investigation and you were consulted and there was a journey. Can you speak to what you would have liked to see at your campus?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You’ve got about a minute left.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Sure. So, I actually I did get a process. Unfortunately, the university tried to delay it as much as possible so they could avoid going through and actually doing the whole process because it was time-constraining for them and it took a lot of resources.

Yes, a process is important, but we shouldn’t need to get to that point, right? Because this all comes from lack of education, lack of understanding within the institutional policies, and if these policies are made correctly, then we won’t need to have to report these things because these things won’t be happening in the institution.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. I hope that we can do more than just a policy. I think sometimes those things sit on shelves, and I’m hopeful that we can animate and take action on a declaration. We can make a lot of declarations, but I hope it goes further to prevent any harm going forward for all of you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay. We’ll now move to the government’s seven-and-a-half-minute round of questions. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank all of the ladies here for being here today, specifically Samantha and Laura for your bravery. You are truly leaders. As a mother, I can’t help but feel so much empathy and compassion for you. It’s troubling. We never want to see our children, our vulnerable put into that situation, and I commend you for being Queen Esthers.

Okay. So, Samantha, I’m going to ask you a first question. You talked about the hostile environment—you’re an artist, yes, at OCAD, was it?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: You talked about a peaceful wall that was created, and it was destroyed, correct?

Ms. Samantha Kline: That’s correct, yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: So when did you first record this? Do you know when you approximately advised OCAD about this issue?

Ms. Samantha Kline: We had gone to them two years prior about the wall and told them that it’s becoming a hostile and toxic environment, and they refused to ignore that because it’s been something that they’ve held so high

up, that they have this wall that anyone can graffiti on. They were so excited that it’s a selling point for their university that they weren’t willing to part with the idea that it’s no longer a safe space and that it’s become something so horrible.

Ms. Laura Smith: So this free speech involved some pretty heinous statements that involved descriptions of actions that were destructive to you and your family? If you could just remind me again, did they take any of it down? Did they paint over it?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Two years ago, they did nothing, and then when I came to them on February 8 with the writing on the wall, there was nothing done. February 12 was when the final incident happened, where the derogatory terms were targeted at me and my family, and unfortunately all they did was paint over it after a week of it being up, and people still continue to write my name over and over again. And ever since it’s been painted, there are more and more things and the police have said it’s not within their jurisdiction to do anything; it lies within the university. But the university has no policies to prevent it.

Ms. Laura Smith: And so, obviously you feel very challenged to be on campus. Do you go to campus now?

Ms. Samantha Kline: I don’t go to campus anymore. They can’t guarantee my safety, and all they have offered to me is to walk around with security, which is, frankly, not what my university experience should have to be like. I should be able to walk freely.

Ms. Laura Smith: This is something that’s going to be happening for a while, a long time, for you. Are you able to finish your final year?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Right now, I submitted my application to graduate. I had to do everything from home, and unfortunately I didn’t have the resources that I need to, so I was paying for an online degree with little to no resources available to me.

Ms. Laura Smith: Were you concerned that you would not be able to finish your final year?

Ms. Samantha Kline: I was concerned. I was very concerned, especially after speaking up about the incidents. Since the university had not been so favourable to me in the past, I was worried that they wouldn’t let me graduate because I was being open about what happened to me.

Ms. Laura Smith: I’m actually going to turn it over to Laura.

First of all, I want to thank you for your bravery, as well, in coming forward. You talked about the posters and you talked about some of the things that affected you. You also talked about a physical assault.

Could you take me back to when you first advised campus about what was happening?

Ms. Laura Barkel: Yes, so I first advised campus at that protest in the beginning of the year—after October, when I was first pulled and told, “Hitler—it’s too bad he didn’t finish his job.” There were actually three campus security guards present there. I went and called security after I had left, traumatized and shaken up, asking why nobody came in to help and support us, because there were maybe four Jewish students and then 40 or 50 non-Jewish

students, and it was very apparent that they were butting heads and it was getting violent. So I called them to ask why they didn't step in as security should to secure the safety of its students and they had no comment. I've tried to follow up and didn't get a response.

Ms. Laura Smith: And this has happened as early as last week?

Ms. Laura Barkel: No follow-ups? Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith:—since the incident occurred last week. You advised that this has continued and there's been no communication.

Ms. Laura Barkel: No. I met with security last week to tell them that this person that was stalking me—I had identified them faster than them, with all of the resources they had. And I asked them if they could let me know if there was anything further, and they didn't respond; they didn't call me. They told me that they would call me. They asked for my number. They didn't follow up, so instead, I went to the police.

Ms. Laura Smith: Could you tell me what this kind of legislation, if passed, would do for you—and, by the way, these are your final moments in school, I suppose? What would this do for the next generation of students—not only Jewish students, but any student facing hate? How do you feel this would change things on campus?

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Ms. Laura Barkel: Based on my experience, I think it would change things, because it would hold institutions more accountable. Instead of having on paper that this is what we don't accept, actually taking action—and as a student waiting for that action, seeing it follow through, I think would be a big deal, because no hate is acceptable. I'm Jewish and I'm speaking to that, but I don't condone any sort of hate. A lot of my non-Jewish friends have received similar hate for supporting me. So I think that accountability and follow-up so we can see that they care and that they're doing something for us to feel validated and supported—it would be the big difference, in my opinion.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm going to ask Samantha the same question.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Sorry; can you repeat the question?

Ms. Laura Smith: If this legislation passed, what do you think that would do for the next generation? Given that you're, as well, in your final year and you're completing your studies, how do you feel this would help the next group of students who face hate?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute.

Ms. Samantha Kline: I think that they would feel more comfortable reporting, and they would feel more comfortable talking to faculty and administration about their issues. I think it would create a lot of opportunity for a decline in racism, in anti-Semitism, in homophobia, and all these issues that students face regularly that they shouldn't have to be facing at a place of learning.

Ms. Laura Smith: Did faculty ever provide any support of any kind?

Ms. Samantha Kline: No.

Ms. Laura Smith: Teachers?

Ms. Samantha Kline: My teachers were barely aware of the situation, and the teachers who were aware of it were targeting me.

Ms. Laura Smith: Do you think you'll ever go back to that campus again?

Ms. Samantha Kline: No.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the official opposition—your first round of seven and a half minutes. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to Samantha and Laura for coming here today. I can't imagine that the retelling gets any easier as you talk about these experiences, and it took a lot of courage to come here and to share with us, so we appreciate that very much.

You come from two different campuses. Your experiences were quite different in terms of where the gaps were, where the failures were when you went to report these incidents. But what that makes me think is that it's important that the policies be grounded in the actual realities and experiences of individual campuses in the province.

One of the concerns that we have heard expressed today is the fact that this legislation, nowhere, talks about the need for consultation with students at each individual campus, or staff, faculty.

You've raised some concerns about the lack of response and support that you've received from faculty. The communities—I live in London; Western is our local institution, and there are big differences across campuses.

Do you have views on the importance of student engagement, especially around anti-Semitism and the experiences of Jewish students? Do you have thoughts about the value of student engagement in the development of these hate policies? I'm going to ask both of you, and if each of you could respond, that would be great.

Ms. Samantha Kline: One of my concerns with student engagement is that, unfortunately, students are confronting both of us, so it's kind of hard to be able to have their involvement when, at the same time, we are receiving backlash from students. So having their opinion and their say on something like this might detract from the ulterior motive, because they might be against such policies, because that would make for them—essentially, getting in trouble for being racist or anti-Semitic to one another. So it might be kind of difficult to have student engagement involved in this. And sometimes we don't need an open dialogue; we just need a very firm policy.

Ms. Laura Barkel: I agree with everything Samantha said, but I also do agree that student voices are important, because in my case, for example, I felt and still do feel very silenced. I think voices are important, but I think it's extremely important to recognize everything that she said in addition. I don't have to repeat her.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you for that. I was also struck listening to you—there's a real gendered nature to the kind of hate that you experienced, which is layered on top of the anti-Semitism. I can't imagine what you've had to deal with over these very last difficult months. So, again, thank you for coming here today.

I wanted to go to Emily from Western USC. It's nice to see you here today. You mentioned that your presentation

was going to reinforce some of the things that OUSA had presented this morning. One of the statistics that they cited, sort of the context for the presentation, was the fact that almost half of Ontario universities are currently facing deficits, reporting deficits. We have heard throughout today a lot of concerns about how you properly resource mental health supports for students when universities and colleges are facing such significant financial pressures.

Can you comment on the reality for Western students who are trying to access mental health supports and if they are resourced sufficiently to meet the needs on campus?

Ms. Emily Poirier: Absolutely. I would say definitely this year, the spectre over all of our advocacy is we want to ask for more resources, but if institutions are having a hard time staying afloat, it's hard to be able to say we specifically need—if they're having a hard time keeping the lights on, then there are hard choices that need to be made, unfortunately. That is something that, luckily, Western students have had pretty solid resources for, mostly because we have had access to different grant funding, all those types of things. But I think, for students, there's a lot of anxiety about what that looks like going forward.

Western is very fortunate to be one of the few institutions in a good financial position, but then I know—AMS spoke briefly—speaking to my colleagues and hearing from students, that they see these things in the news and they have a lot of concern: “What does it mean for my institution?” Because most of the students do not have the context that student leaders have in terms of what their institutional bottom line looks like. So in terms of Western's context, it causes a lot of anxiety, even if there is not a direct impact currently. I also believe there is no real way to see, going forward, what that will look like in terms of service provision.

By investing more consistently in universities, I do believe that will let people have more of the supports, in order to support these policies that are being brought forward.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes, the announcement of the legislation came with a funding announcement. There's an additional \$8 million for the post-secondary mental health action plan, but that is over three years, which is \$2.7 million per year. There's 47 post-secondary institutions in Ontario, so when you do the math, it's \$57,000 in additional funding per institution to go along with this action plan or with this new requirement for a mental health policy.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Do you think that is going to make a real difference for students at Western who are waiting weeks, if not months, to get an appointment to see a councillor for a mental health issue that they're experiencing?

Ms. Emily Poirier: The short answer would be no. I think there is some impact that will be able to be had, but \$57,000 doesn't even cover a new councillor. That doesn't cover a lot of additional resources. I think there are things that can be done with \$57,000 to help alleviate some of the backlog, but I don't believe that it will be able to address the core issue there.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Clancy, your final round.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you very much. I'd like to start by asking Emily a little bit more detail on your recommendations. When you say you want more check-ins—instead of five years, two years—can you explain why that's important?

Ms. Emily Poirier: I think a big part of that is that five years is longer than your average student is doing a degree. Some students are taking, myself included, but the average, if we're talking about a four-year degree—we're not even taking into account entire generations of students during those consultations. And if we're not renewing it more frequently, then it's much harder for those policies to adapt. I think the pandemic is kind of the largest example of that.

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If we're looking at mental health during the pandemic, that is such a different environment than we would have been facing even two years before. So if a policy had been renewed in 2019 and if we were renewing it five years later in 2024, that landscape is so incredibly different in terms of what students need access to, in terms of what students are experiencing, in terms of just the political climate of all these different things that are happening.

By ensuring that we're renewing them more frequently, we're getting more student consultation more frequently from different generations of students. We're also making sure that these policies are still accurate to what students are experiencing on campus.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Okay; thank you.

I'll ask the next question to Samantha and Laura. It sounds like you had as much harm online as in person, and that's something that I'm finding across the board, that online hate is really exploding. Would you say that you'd like to see the government take some action to combat online hate as well as in-person hate on campus?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Sure. I do know about the new bill that's coming out for online hate and I think that definitely will help, the one with regard to—I can't remember exactly what it's called—censoring things on Twitter.

Anyway, I think that we need some sort of institutional support. If students from the institution are posting within their institutional accounts, like their club accounts, and they're posting derogatory or bigoted things against us, then there needs to be some sort of repercussions for that. Because right now, the institutions say, “Well, it's an Instagram account; we're not going to do anything,” even though it has the university name in it because it's affiliated with a club or a student who has a university tag in their bio. I think, at the end of the day, you're still representing your university, so there needs to be repercussions for things that you say.

Ms. Laura Barkel: I would agree. In my case, I felt that a lot of people hid behind their phones to share their hate and I think it's important to have policies in place that ensure people will look into that and those individuals, so they don't take action like stalking someone in the streets, like me, or hitting someone, or spitting on someone because they recognize them and sent them messages and don't feel like any repercussions are there.

And I agree. I run a club on my campus and a lot of clubs have messaged our page with a lot of hate, thinking it's okay because they represent the institution, and I don't think it's okay.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute left.

Ms. Laura Barkel: I think it would make it a lot easier and open a lot of people's eyes to the fact that this is an issue that people are hiding behind.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, and I hope that not only will we see more consultation—thorough consultation—but hopefully kind of reaching out to some experts like the Ontario tech institute and the Canadian Anti-Hate Network. They've done great work in studying this matter, and so we can seek out the advice of experts in the fields as part of the fulsome consultation that I think we all hope to see going forward.

Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay. We'll now turn it over to the government's final round. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: I'm going to ask both, once again, Samantha and Laura to help paint a picture of this. I truly admire your strength and your courage in this circumstance. If this is difficult, then we can take a pause.

One of the things that I was going to ask Samantha, because she talked about what was happening on campus—and I know that Laura talked a lot about the rallies that were happening. Were there any what you would consider hateful rallies at OCAD?

Ms. Samantha Kline: There was one hateful rally at OCAD where students were holding up signs that resembled concentration camps. As a Jewish person, that was very hard. And they were comparing it to Gaza.

And they called for an intifada, which is—I'm sure all of you know what it is—

Ms. Laura Smith: What does intifada mean?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Intifada is a violent uprising against Jews.

Ms. Laura Smith: So intifada actually means a violent uprising against Jews, and it was being said at OCAD.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: So students were participating in this?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Yes, but it's also taken place in the form of artwork, where there's been posters for intifada sold at my school or book sales. There was a bomb simulation run by profs and students right after October 7, where—

Ms. Laura Smith: Wait—did you say “professors”?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Professors and students that had gone together to run—

Ms. Laura Smith: So professors had also—

Ms. Samantha Kline: Professors and students, both of them.

Ms. Laura Smith: That's very interesting. So the professors had partaken in this display as well.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: All right. I'm going to swap over to Laura, because you're obviously well attuned. You're president of your club, and good on you for continuing the

process. How prevalent is this? We've painted a picture, and many of us could look at both of you and say, “These are just two students.” How prevalent is this on campus, in your opinion?

Ms. Laura Barkel: Anti-Semitism?

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes.

Ms. Laura Barkel: I think it's extremely prevalent. Personally, a day doesn't go by that I don't feel targeted, because people take videos of me and pictures of me walking around every day, to the point that I stopped walking around campus and walk with a security or WalkSafe or I drive to school. I think it's prevalent in the campus community but also in classes where comments are made and it is dismissed, and either presentations of anti-Semitism, not just in rallies but other ways on campus that the school doesn't address or takes too long to address or we have to beg them to address, and that creates a tension and a dark cloud over all of us, that we feel it everywhere and every day.

Ms. Laura Smith: How has this affected your schoolwork?

Ms. Laura Barkel: My marks are not as good. It's embarrassing to say. I've struggled a lot this semester, and I'm extremely glad that I'm graduating, because I don't think I'd be able to continue my degree into next year if I wasn't. I've also struggled socially, because I'm scared to talk to people, because people talk about me in classes, and I know a lot of professors who are openly anti-Semitic, and it's isolated me in every single way that you can probably imagine.

Ms. Laura Smith: Samantha?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Sorry. Say that again.

Ms. Laura Smith: It's okay. How has this affected your schoolwork?

Ms. Samantha Kline: My grades have declined immensely. I find myself—instead of creating things that I want to be making, I'm creating things just to get by and essentially paying for a degree where I'm not learning anything. I can't focus in my classes. I look around, and I see people that have just been hating on me online or have talked about me with professors. It's hard for me to concentrate. I can't even walk into school without having a panic attack.

Ms. Laura Smith: And I know Laura was talking her friendships and how they've been challenged by this. Have your friendships been challenged, as well, at school?

Ms. Samantha Kline: I've lost almost all of my friends at school because I'm Jewish, and they have directly told me that they don't want to be friends with a Jew who has this sort of reputation of being Zionist.

Ms. Laura Smith: What's my time?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): The time is just under three minutes.

Ms. Laura Smith: What are your plans for next year? You're graduating. I'm just interested. I'm actually honestly interested in you and your mental health right now, because this has been—what you've put forth is a very challenging year, and since October 7, we've all been through quite a bit. What are your plans?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Right now, my plan is to go to Israel because I feel like I'm only safe with other Jews around me.

Ms. Laura Smith: So, wait—you're saying you're actually safer in Israel than you are here?

Ms. Samantha Kline: I feel safer in a war zone than I do on my own university campus.

Ms. Laura Smith: And why would that be?

Ms. Samantha Kline: It's because of the direct threats to my life, whereas in a war zone, everyone is going through the same thing. In Israel, it's mutual, whereas I'm going through this alone, I feel isolated and there's no one to protect me.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm going to ask the same question.

Ms. Laura Barkel: I'm also moving to Israel, for the exact same reason of the safety I feel there. I was actually just there in February, and I dreaded coming home because of the hate I experienced at school. I'm doing a master's in counterterrorism, so I'm going there for school and also just because it's the only place that I feel like I can be myself without being scared for being myself.

Ms. Laura Smith: So you feel safer in a country that's facing war right now than you do on your own campus?

Ms. Laura Barkel: Yes, 100%—even when I visited the Gaza Envelope, I felt safer there than I do walking around school.

Ms. Laura Smith: Is there anything else? If you could go back and put more directives into this, is there anything that you would contribute to this? Samantha? Laura?

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Ms. Samantha Kline: I think there need to be harsher circumstances on faculties and administrations to stand up against anti-Semitism, and there needs to be a recognized definition of anti-Semitism.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Since the Canadian government does recognize IHRA, that should be enforced on university campuses, because if there are no definitions, then what are they dealing with, what do they have to hold up to? If they can't even define a word of hatred that people are experiencing, then they have nothing to hold up any of the things that the students are facing.

Ms. Laura Barkel: I agree and echo everything Samantha just said. As well, if there was a way for the university or institutions to adopt certain definitions of hate—like if I get spit on on campus, it should be recorded. If I get hit with a book, it should be something that they care about and follow up. I shouldn't have to separately go to the police and make a report and go through that on my own after being dismissed by my institution. So I think there should be more transparency in that way—of a hate crime is a hate crime.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

We'll move to the official opposition's final list of questions. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: To our three presenters, thank you very much for taking the time to come out to educate us at the committee today. I recognize that today's conver-

sation is not easy for you. I also want to acknowledge the harm that you're experiencing.

Because we have to work in a systems approach—because obviously we're here talking about the financial health of universities and colleges, the way they can actually create a safer learning environment for their students, for their faculty, for everybody on campus, including visitors, I'm sure. The government has talked about the historic investments in universities, and we think it's important to invest in the universities. But the government also received expert panel recommendations that they needed to invest \$2.5 billion over three years to keep the universities staying afloat. Every university has a slightly different financial profile.

I'm just curious, when you went to your administration to report some of the incidents that you're seeing and how it was making you feel unsafe, did you get a sense that they were equipped to deal with the problem because they had the resources and the systems and tools in place, or do you believe that they just didn't care?

Ms. Laura Barkel: I think it's definitely both—I think certain incidents seemed like they didn't care, while others, they definitely had the resources, and they didn't use them. I think, more than anything, it's just about equality and seeing something as it is—like I was just saying, that hate is hate—and you have to take those steps; you have to care, and you have to regard it in that way.

Ms. Samantha Kline: Just to add on to that, I feel that it was purely just because they didn't recognize Jews as a marginalized group. Jews are seen as white individuals in society when, factually, that's not true. So they didn't address my concerns because of my appearance.

I think we have ODESI for a reason. We have the dean of students for a reason. We have all these different ways to approach situations, yet each and every step failed to recognize both my and Laura's issues—so I think it was purely just the institution not upholding to their standards and not receiving pressure from ombudsmen or other government organizations to do something about it.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Right now, as it stands, Ontario's funding per college student is 44%, and 57% for universities—because it's actually quite a dire situation. Everyone is sort of crying about the financial distress that universities and colleges are facing, but students themselves are also facing quite a bit of emotional and financial stress.

So I'm wanting to understand, what would it take for the universities to have the resources that they need to be successful—especially when you brought very serious allegations forward. You reported some crimes. It sounds like they were hate crimes; I'm no expert. But what would it take for them to have the resources to be successful?

Ms. Laura Barkel: I think it's just caring to implement them. Like Sam said, they have these resources in place. They have all these offices, and they don't take those steps until there's pressure. I definitely think there are measures in place, and I just don't think they're used properly. Like, for example, there was someone holding a swastika at my school. It took three hours for them to move her. That

shouldn't be okay, and then it took a couple of days for them to release a statement, while a lot of Jewish students and others students affected by the Holocaust were in shambles, you know?

Ms. Samantha Kline: In terms of funding, I don't think we can directly speak on that, because we do not know how much the university allocates to ODESI or these other programs. So I think we just aren't the right people to answer that question. I wish I had a better answer for you.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: That's okay. It's good for us to learn from your place of experience even if you may not know all the official numbers and positions.

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health spoke before you. They were, I think, our 2 o'clock time slot. They raised an issue that many of the universities and colleges already have some type of framework in place with respect to dealing with mental health policies, as well as racism and hate. And in particular, they felt that many of the universities and colleges already have broader policies than what is covered in Bill 166 and that any type of approach moving towards expanding or addressing racism and hate has to come with an intersectionality-based policy analysis. I'm just reading it from their note. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Samantha Kline: I think whatever policies they have right now clearly aren't working, so to argue that that's enough would be a misunderstanding of the issues.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It sounds like the policies are not being adequately and uniformly applied. Is that a fair assessment?

Ms. Samantha Kline: Yes. It's also that they need pressure from, unfortunately, higher institutions such as the government to implicate these policies. If they're getting away without properly implicating them, then what's going to stop them from continuing it?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Earlier, you mentioned that you didn't trust a consultation process that would involve students. But I think the majority of other speakers that spoke today wanted to see deeper engagement and consultation with the student as well as the campus body. How do we square that? We've got two different opinions here.

Ms. Samantha Kline: I think it, firstly, starts off with recognizing the definition of each form of hate so that way they can properly address it. I also think—sorry; can you repeat it again?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Just in terms of wanting to understand—I think you specifically said you don't want to see the consultation or you weren't sure if you could trust the consultation process with students. But every other speaker, I think, with the exception of one other, thought that consultation was quite agreeable.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute left.

Ms. Samantha Kline: It's an amazing resource if it can happen properly. But unfortunately when our universities are posting derogatory things against Jews and blaming us for the conflict in the Middle East, then it's hard to go to the university and seek help when there is already pre-noted bias.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Can you explain to the committee how we could trust handing over the power—I mean, the minister has the power already. How can we trust the minister to do the right thing without consultation with the body of the individuals that would be most directly affected?

Ms. Samantha Kline: I'm not sure how to properly answer that question.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Would you—

Ms. Laura Barkel: I'm also not sure I fully understand; sorry.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay, no problem.

Do you want to take a shot at it?

Ms. Emily Poirier: Sure. So I personally am a strong believer in student consultation. I think that an important part of the student consultation process—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Unfortunately, that's the time we have for today. I want to take the opportunity to thank all of our presenters for being here today in front of the committee.

That concludes today's business. The committee stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, when we'll resume public hearings on Bill 166.

The committee adjourned at 1750.

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