



National Office
205 Placer Court
Toronto, Ontario M2H 3H9

UNIFOR
theUnion | lesyndicat

Bureau national
205 Placer Court
Toronto (Ontario) M2H 3H9

Jerry Dias
National President
Président national

Renaud Gagné
Quebec Director
Directeur québécois

Lana Payne
National Secretary-Treasurer
Secrétaire-trésorière nationale

June 22, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford, M.L.A.
Premier of the Province of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queens Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Sent by e-mail: premier@ontario.ca

Dear Premier Ford:

RE: Addressing and Dismantling Systemic Racism in Ontario

As you are aware, recent events in the United States – specifically the high profile killings of Black people at the hands of law enforcement, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Rayshard Brooks – has resulted in mass protests erupting across the U.S. and Canada, including right here in Ontario. These local protests have shed a light on issues of systemic racism in the province and the failure by your government in promptly acknowledging and addressing them. Most noticeably, since taking power, issues of racism and equity have been largely neglected or deliberately dismissed.

In fact, many of the cuts to public services, programs, and policy reversals that you have brought forward, all have direct negative impacts on racialized and Indigenous people in Ontario – significantly undermining the quality of life for these communities. This includes, for example, cuts to OSAP, community legal aid clinics and affordable housing and rolling back the scheduled increase to the minimum wage to \$15 and changes to employments standards. Within this context, we find your announcement earlier this month of creating a ‘Council on Equality of Opportunity’ (replacing the previous Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities you ended two years ago) and a meagre \$1.5 million in funding to support Black families and youth as merely symbolic, one-off gestures. In the end, this will do little to eliminate systemic barriers that racialized people are facing.

Leadership and decisive bold action needs to be taken to address the many complex issues which we are seeing. From police violence, systemic racism in our public education system and dramatic rise in hate crimes, provincial response has been slow and inadequate. It is clear that the status quo is no longer an option. Issues of racism, particularly anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and Islamophobia is something that must be tackled head-on. Doing so, however, requires a plan, resources and political will.

As an organization that is dedicated to eliminating racism and discrimination and promoting equity in our workplaces and our communities, we strongly believe more needs to be done. As such, we have identified some key areas of policy intervention and have developed the following recommendations:

Supporting Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD)

- Re-appoint a Cabinet Minister solely dedicated to overseeing and advancing the work of the Anti-Racism Directorate. This important portfolio should not be under the purview of the Minister of the Solicitor-General.
- Reinstate the four ARD subcommittees that your government disbanded in 2018 that were convened to provide recommendations on ways to address anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Semitic and Islamophobia racism.
- Hold annual anti-racism conferences to convene researchers, policymakers, community organizations and impacted communities to discuss, share and evaluate resources and policies to further the ARD's work. Although mandated by the previous government, your administration has currently failed to live up to this commitment.
- Ensure the Province properly resources and adopts the strategic plan put forward in the ARD's [Anti-Black Racism Strategy](#).

Eliminating Systemic Racism from our Education System

- Ongoing, and deeply troubling incidents of racism reported in Ontario school boards, including in Peel and York Region for example, have shown how deeply embedded racism is in our educational system. We recommend the province conduct comprehensive investigations and audits of systemic racism in school boards across the province and document and evaluate how effective boards and school officials are at addressing them. A concrete anti-racism action plan must also be developed which can include a review of existing education policy as well as mandatory anti-racism training for all school board trustees and school administrators.
- End the School Resource Officer program and policing of youth. Rather, reallocate resources to increase the hiring of Black and Indigenous counsellors and mental health professionals in the school system, as well as an increase in arts, culture and recreational programming.
- Lower university and college tuition fees and restore OSAP funding to increase access to post-secondary education and develop specific programs to facilitate entry for Indigenous and racialized youth interested in skilled trades.
- Ensure that Black and Indigenous history is permanently incorporated into public school curriculum and is extensively taught year-round.

Increasing Access to Justice

- Reverse cuts made to community legal clinics, particularly those that service ethno-racial communities, which severely impedes access to justice for people of colour and their ability to assert their legal rights.

Enhancing Employment Standards and Income Security

- A disproportionate number of racialized workers are working in low-wage and precarious jobs and are in economically insecure households. Immediately reinstate the \$15 minimum wage and all changes made to the Employment Standards and Labour Relations Act from the previous Bill-148, *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*.

Improving Access to Mental Health Supports

- It is evident that police are not adequately trained to deal with people suffering from mental health crises. We therefore recommend significantly increasing funding for mental health

supports, free and low cost counselling services, and examining the effectiveness of the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team (MCRRT) currently in place in several jurisdictions, as a model for non-lethally deescalating situations when people are in distress and may be at risk of harming others or themselves.

Supporting Quality Affordable Housing

- The housing crisis and skyrocketing shelter costs is severely affecting the quality of life for people across the province. We want to see the construction of more affordable housing units in Ontario's most densely populated cities, a reversal to funding cuts to rent and housing support programs, as well as repealing legislation that makes it easier to evict tenants from social housing and gives more power to landlords to raise rent and remove tenants.

Disaggregated Race-based Data Collection

- We applaud your government's recent decision to begin collecting race-based data in response to growing concerns that the COVID19 pandemic is hitting racialized communities disproportionately harder. However, we wish to reiterate our request that race-based data collection be expanded to all provincial ministries and departments (e.g. education, housing, employment, safety, etc.) to better understand how racism and discrimination affects other key social and economic areas. This data should also be readily accessible to the public.

We strongly urge your government to seriously consider and implement these proposals and demonstrate the necessary leadership and commitment in eliminating systemic racism throughout the province. Global events have reignited much needed conversations about racism within our institutions and our communities and we must seize this moment as an opportunity to build a better province that leaves no one behind.

We thank you for your time and consideration on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



NAUREEN RIZVI

Unifor Ontario Regional Director

NR\mb:cope343

H:\5-Research\Navjeet\Anti-Racism-Ltr Premier Ford.docx