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Standing Committee on Social Policy

Strengthening Accountability
and Student Supports Act, 2024

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Tuesday 16 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

Mardi 16 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**

Tuesday 16 April 2024

Mardi 16 avril 2024

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.

**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): Good morning, everyone. I call the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order. We're meeting this morning to resume public hearings on Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act.

I want to ensure that all of our presenters this morning—I'm asking all the participants to speak clearly and slowly for the purposes of Hansard. I would ask that you wait until I recognize you before you speak. I want to remind all the participants this morning that all the questions and comments will go through the Chair.

As a reminder, every presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation followed by 39 minutes of questions this morning. We're going to divide them 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 four and a half minutes to the independent members as a group.

CONESTOGA STUDENTS INC.

MS. SARAH GOLOMBEK

ONTARIO TECH STUDENT UNION

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'm first going to call on the Conestoga students association. I'd ask that you introduce yourself for the purposes of Hansard. You can begin your seven-minute presentation.

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: Awesome. Good morning, committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you all today regarding Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act. My name is Nelson Chukwuma, and I am here today on behalf of

Conestoga Students Inc., CSI, the official student association of Conestoga College, representing over 40,000 students in Ontario.

First, I would like to be clear that we support the proposed bill's intentions to improve mental health supports, address incidents of hate and racism, and institutional transparency by ensuring students have the resources and information they need. While we support it, there are two areas that I would like to focus on today. The first is requiring student input/consultation, and the second is ensuring sufficient funding for the sector.

First, the legislation does not require institutions to include students in the creation of the framework and policies that will directly impact their student experience. The legislation should ensure the inclusion of student governing bodies in the development and reviewing of both the mental health framework and addressing incidents of hate and racism policy, similar to O. Reg. 131/16, which focuses on sexual violence harassment policies.

Unfortunately, not every institution actively solicits and engages students to obtain their input in creating and revising institutional policies and frameworks. Student governing bodies such as CSI are elected to represent their student membership, understand the nuances of student needs and are trusted by students to ensure their voice is represented within their institution. Legislating student input from student governing bodies would guarantee that student input is heard and that those who are most impacted by these issues will have an integral role in developing the policy, which will ultimately strengthen the policies overall.

Secondly, the sector is currently in a funding crisis. CSI was very pleased to see the \$1.3-billion investment in the most recent budget, but this fell short of the blue-ribbon panel's recommendation of \$2.5 billion required by the sector to ensure its sustainability. This, compounded by the freeze on domestic tuition and loss of international tuition revenues through the federal cap, contributes to further exasperating the funding crisis.

Every good plan must be accompanied by appropriate funding to ensure its success. This remains true for the proposed mental health framework and addressing incidents of hate and racism. This framework and policy can only be as effective as the funding available to implement them. But without sufficient funds to implement, they will remain a plan, resulting in no impactful improvements for students experiencing mental health crises and/or inci-

dents of hate or racism. Additionally, funding needs to be stable and ongoing to ensure the implementation of these initiatives is able to be completed and reliably maintained. Therefore, significantly higher and reliable investments in the sector are required to ensure institutions are able to provide the necessary student supports and maintain the high quality of education that Ontario is known for.

The Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act is a very positive step forward to ensure that post-secondary students in Ontario are supported, but we must ensure that it is implemented concurrently with student consultation and proper institutional funding to ensure their long-term intended impact and success.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today regarding Bill 166. CSI looks forward to continuing to work with the provincial government to ensure that institutions and students are supported through the implementation of Bill 166.

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

Sarah, do you want to introduce yourself for the purposes of Hansard? You can begin your seven-minute presentation.

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Sure. Hi, everyone. I'm Sarah. Good morning. I wanted to start by saying thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences with the committee. I appreciate you all taking the time to listen to my testimony and experience.

My name is Sarah Golombek, and I am a fifth-year student at the University of Guelph. I will be graduating in June with a bachelor of arts and science, with specializations in family and child studies and biology.

Throughout my undergraduate education, I have been an active member of Guelph Hillel, the only Jewish campus club accredited by our undergraduate Central Student Association. The minute I stepped foot on campus, I was met with the warmth of a tight-knit, active and vibrant Jewish community, welcoming me in with open arms.

After four years of cultivating community and facilitating meaningful programming as an executive board member, for my fifth and final year at Guelph I excitedly decided to take on the role of president of Guelph Hillel. Little did I know I was signing up to lead a Jewish campus group through one of the darkest, most politically fraught times in our collective history, characterized by unprecedented levels of hostility towards Jews around the world and, in particular, on university campuses.

Guelph has historically been known as one of the milder campuses in terms of anti-Semitism, which further accentuated the profound shift in the campus atmosphere I felt after October 7. While our campus is not unique, in the sense that it has never been entirely immune to anti-Semitic incidents, systems and rhetoric, it has always felt, for whatever reason, somewhat contained. However, shortly after October 7, everything changed. It felt as though the Israel-Hamas war gave reason and permission for the anti-Semitism historically harboured relatively quietly by U of G students, faculty and staff to bubble up to the surface of campus life.

The past six months have fractured our spirits. As Jewish students, we are upset, broken and hurting, a sentiment that is constantly ignored, demonized, undermined and delegitimized on campus by the lack of policies in place to address our concerns, as well as by students, faculty and administration on social media, in conversations and as indicated through a general lack of outreach and care. In my experience meeting with university administration as president of Hillel, to my surprise, even post-October 7, almost none of the senior-level administrators at the University of Guelph had even heard of Hillel, exhibiting a completely unacceptable disconnect between senior university administration and our campus Jewish community, and making meaningful change feel even further from reach.

In meeting with our university's diversity and human rights office, I reinforced the importance of proactive measures in ensuring the psychological safety of Jewish students on campus, namely transparency in its policies and procedures and the importance of building strong relationships with the Jewish community.

One of the diversity and human rights office's most problematic practices is the early and formal complaint resolution process. Most recently, at a protest on campus, I was taunted and mocked by masked peers in neon crossing vests. I was blocked by a line of unofficial marshals from entering the University Centre, one of whom instructed the rest, "Don't talk to Zionists." Another protester in an orange vest pointed at me and whispered to the people beside them, giggling. Speaking from personal experience, it feels both daunting and humiliating to file a harassment complaint with the office of diversity and human rights when you don't know the names or faces of the people who have harassed you, because they are all masked at a protest. The onus to navigate complex, arduous processes should not be on students who are experiencing hate and trauma. These processes often lead to no disciplinary action or consequences, causing students to relive their injustices in vain.

Further, campus police or administration did not interfere or comment on the discriminative, disruptive behaviour of individuals at this protest. University policy explicitly affirms that the right to protest is protected so long as it does not interfere with university activities. If students policing other students on campus, deciding who gets to enter the university spaces, is not a clear example of disrupting regular university activities, I'm not sure what would meet the minimum threshold. These policies and promises are empty if universities are not held accountable to uphold them.

Following the protest, students found my name and face on our Hillel's Instagram. Shortly after, fellow students made social media posts and Instagram stories speaking about me by name, calling me a liar, a racist and a bigot. One comment reads, "white supremacist colonizer." This online harassment and cyberbullying interfered with my studies and began contributing to a decline in my mental health, ultimately causing me to delete my Instagram account.

0910

I experienced another instance of discrimination shortly following October 7, where I lost a research position. I had been volunteering in a biology lab on campus for just under a year when the October 7 attacks occurred. I had been on great terms and in constant communication with the PhD student who had hired me and was open with her about my Jewishness and involvement in Hillel. Shortly after the war broke out, the PhD student ceased all communications with me.

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

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I no longer received lab-wide emails and was never asked to come into the lab again. I wish I could say I was confused about what had fractured our relationship, but I immediately understood exactly what had happened when I saw the anti-Israel statement posted to her social media. She was holding me, a Jewish undergraduate student, accountable for the war, a clear example of anti-Semitism.

People are afraid to be associated with me, as they know I am Jewish and will not give them the confirmation that they so desperately seek, that I am one of the so-called good ones: an anti-Zionist Jew. When peers learn I grew up attending Hebrew school, I am consistently met with the same look of apprehension, fear and discomfort that speaks for itself: a facial expression that posits without words, “You went to Hebrew school, but you’re not a Zionist, right?” As an Israeli Jew, Zionism and Judaism and their interconnectedness are intrinsic to who I am. These are not just beliefs or convictions but are elements of my innermost core identity—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Sarah, that’s the end of your seven minutes. I want to thank you.

Members, as was your direction as a committee, our next presenter, the Ontario Tech Student Union—both Samantha and Angelique have indicated they would like to speak. I just want to make sure that I get your consent that both are allowed to speak, given the direction of the committee.

Seeing no objections, I will turn it over to the Ontario Tech Student Union. I’d ask you to introduce yourselves for the purposes of Hansard. You may begin.

Ms. Samantha Brown: My name is Samantha Brown and I serve as the Ontario Tech Student Union president, and with me is Angelique Dack, our VP downtown. We represent over 10,000 students at Ontario Tech University, situated on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, now known as Oshawa.

I’d like to thank the Chair, members of the committee and staff for being here today to listen to the feedback our team has brought forward regarding Bill 166.

Ms. Angelique Dack: While Bill 166 has provisions that greatly benefit our students—there is some recognition regarding higher mental health services needed on and around campuses, formalization of anti-hate processes and progress towards cost transparency—however, our team would like to see several revisions to just strengthen the accountability that students seek for it to provide, so, under

the student mental health policy, including an addition to it: a description of what the student input process looks like for that institution, which is aligned with the language in regulation 131/16 of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act.

As highlighted by a number of delegates before you, policies pertaining to students should incorporate meaningful student consultation, and paid when possible. At Ontario Tech, policy review encapsulates engagement with committees, including student representatives, and are then open to consultation opportunities for the overall student body. However, accessing and participating in this process poses significant challenges for not only our students but others at different institutions, many juggling full-time academic schedules along with multiple jobs to make ends meet. And so, introducing a provision that includes institution-specific student input processes to simplify for our students what the regulatory framework is would then allow for them to actively engage through fostering a more inclusive, accessible and community-informed policy environment.

Alongside that, we would love for the expansion of our understanding of student mental health services to include supports such as but not limited to Indigenous centres, DEI offices and student-facing departments to allow for additional supports for these services.

It’s critical in conversations around student mental health to recognize the social determinants of health and recognize their impact on well-being, such as housing, access to health care, cultural backgrounds and so forth. This understanding becomes even more critical when we think of the historical inequities and systemic barriers of certain groups, such as our Indigenous communities, in accessing adequate mental health supports. Therefore, we would like to see policy recognizing this dialogue around services that are not explicitly categorized as mental health services but fulfill this very critical role for our students, particularly those with marginalized identities.

Myself, being a queer student at Ontario Tech, I was able to find community in our Pride club on campus. I want the same for other students, and I want that service specifically to also be classified under student mental health because it was able to support me and other queer students on our campus.

Ms. Samantha Brown: In agreement with our provincial advocacy body, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, the OTSU recommends that a new clause should be added such that a provincial advisory committee should be struck and comprised of racialized and religious students, faculty, staff, administrators and community leaders. This committee would be responsible for helping create and advise the policies being developed at post-secondary institutions.

The OTSU also notes that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should mandate that all institution-based mental health care providers receive training on providing accessible, trauma-informed and culturally relevant counselling and referrals to diverse populations. When creating these policies and rules to address and combat racism and

hate, it's critical that we involve members of that marginalized community—that under-represented group etc.—that insight into lived experiences that also guides discussions about how to provide student support across the community in the best way.

Consultation is a tool to help us understand how cultural differences may affect and influence perceptions and interactions with others, which is particularly important when creating those policies to address and combat racism and hate.

The Ontario Tech Student Union recommends that the provincial government mandate all post-secondary institutions to have a policy on racial and religious equity, and each institution should have the autonomy to create a policy that references the support on campus and trusted resources in their campus community and that they can provide. There should also be a provincially based body that institutions can consult to ensure that those policies that are concerning racism and hate are actively considering culturally relevant responses. When students experience an incident of racism or hate, they should feel assured knowing that they have a reliable and safe option to rely on so they're able to disclose these incidents.

It's valuable to also highlight that campus communities at post-secondary institutions are a space where people are interested in continuous learning. Where students need resources, everyone on campus should be able to have access to training to equip themselves with skills to create safer and more inclusive campus environments for everybody.

As institutions will be required to establish policies about their process to combat racism and hate through Bill 166, subsequent support for it and the daily success of this bill ensures that mandatory training for faculty staff and students is included in these policies.

We urge the committee to consider our recommendations for provisions of Bill 166 to reinforce institutional policies, as they're created to foster positive student experience in post-secondary education.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you all for your presentations. We'll now move to the first round of questions. The government is first. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: First of all, I want to thank all the presenters for taking the time to be here. We value and appreciate your contributions, and I value your leadership in your community and within the province of Ontario. It's a lot about bravery.

I'm going to focus some of my questions on Sarah. You talked about the incident that happened on campus, where you were physically restricted from getting onto your own campus. Could you take me back to that day and talk about the reporting techniques? We're just going to talk about that for a bit.

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Certainly, yes. On the day of that protest, there were, as I spoke about briefly, the marshals, who were part of the group who organized the protest—

Ms. Laura Smith: In the jackets? They were marked in yellow jackets.

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Yes, in vests. They were essentially restricting who could enter and not enter the University Centre. I think they were trying to—I don't know—ensure no form of escalation. But of course, this is not an appropriate way to go about this.

Ms. Laura Smith: And these marshals, who were part of the university, physically stopped you from entering your own campus?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: These marshals were students, actually—fellow students, yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Self-assigned? How did they become marshals?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Self-assigned within the organization that organized the protest. They were part of this student group and I guess they were assigned within that group to be in charge of sort of policing who was walking by.

Ms. Laura Smith: I appreciate your candidness—you went to report this afterwards. You were not able to successfully enter the grounds. You reported this. What happened?

0920

Ms. Sarah Golombek: As president, I work with the head of the multi-faith resource team, and so we had a conversation with her about how to proceed, following the events of the protest. She advised us that it likely would not amount to anything, seeing as we did not have names or identities—

Ms. Laura Smith: Because everyone was masked.

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Yes, everyone was masked and, also, it was part of the large group. She advised us that it's difficult to make a complaint on about 100 people.

Ms. Laura Smith: This is not just a singular incident, I'm assuming. There have been other instances?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: There have been many, yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Would that stop other individuals from reporting, as well?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Oh, certainly.

Ms. Laura Smith: What does this mean to you? If this legislation were to pass—and I'm sorry; you're in fourth year?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: My fifth year.

Ms. Laura Smith: Fifth year. Congratulations. This is the final—

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Final push, yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: This is a victory. Congratulations. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

What do you think this legislation, if passed, would do for future generations of not only Jewish students but any faith that would be entering and feel unsafe?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I think there's a serious lack of accountability on university campuses, which I've experienced first-hand, both as a student leader and as a private student who's just trying to get an undergraduate education. Whether it's out of fear of backlash or non-binding policies or ignorance towards the experiences of Jewish students on campus, there's just a complete inaction, at least of my university administration, in combatting anti-Semitism on our campus, which, to me, indicates a dire

need for change. So I think this policy definitely could be a step in the right direction in terms of holding universities accountable.

Ms. Laura Smith: What more could colleges and universities do to support not only Hillel but other organizations on campus?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I definitely think there needs to be further transparency between the administration and the student body, as well as the forging of connections. It was super disappointing to me that the university, or at least the administration that I met with, did not know what Hillel was, did not know who we were and why we were having a meeting. So I'm hopeful that there can be increased communication and consultation with these groups, in addition to transparency.

Ms. Laura Smith: You talked about being categorized because of your faith or your upbringing, and you talked about having a position and that being stripped away from you, and you talked about being one of the good ones—if you could elaborate on that a bit, please.

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I do know that I don't owe others justification for my identity and that I should not need to justify my identity in order to be accepted on campus. I'm constantly stigmatized on campus just for being who I am and for having the experiences that I've had, which is, of course, completely unfair. And there appear to be no consequences for people perpetrating this discrimination.

Ms. Laura Smith: Have you ever heard of anything being adjudicated in these manners?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: No.

Ms. Laura Smith: Let's talk about your grades and the mental health issue, which is so important—a composite of this bill, as well. What happened to your grades post—and I know we've talked about the fact that hate and discrimination have existed prior to October 7, but what has resulted since that time?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I'm very grateful that I have a great support system around me of peers and family and professionals, should I need, but it has been very difficult to juggle, of course, my responsibility to my community on campus as Hillel president, as well as my personal life, my final semester of university where I'm taking five courses, and also dealing with—

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

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Oh, sure.

I'm simultaneously dealing with these really, really difficult and charged encounters. So it has all amounted to a semester that has been incredibly challenging for my mental health and for my academics.

Ms. Laura Smith: I assume this is a financial loss. You had a position in the lab with—

Ms. Sarah Golombek: It was a volunteer position.

Ms. Laura Smith: It was a volunteer situation? So this has impeded your ability to further your studies—

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith:—so that you could further, ultimately, not only your academic but your professional life, post-education?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Yes. I was looking forward to working in the lab in my final year of university for the purpose of graduate school and my résumé.

Ms. Laura Smith: Can I ask where you're going after this? I'm a mother; I'm going to ask.

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I'm waiting to hear back, but I'm hoping to pursue a master's of social work somewhere in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you. We'll now move to the next round of questions. The official opposition: MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to all of our presenters for joining us this morning.

Sarah, I know that the telling of your experiences can never be easy, and I really appreciate you coming to committee today to talk about how it felt to be a target of anti-Semitism on your campus and the importance of taking action.

I wanted to, however, focus my questions on Conestoga students and the Ontario Tech Student Union, especially around concerns regarding funding. Nelson, you talked about the fact that the blue-ribbon panel had noted that \$2.5 billion—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Yes?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I believe these comments and this line of questioning are out of order. We're here to talk today about Bill 166 and not the blue-ribbon panel. So if the member can gear her questions toward—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): So I paused to protect your time. You're asking a question that was brought up in his presentation, so I'll allow you to go a little farther. Please continue.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Chair.

I wanted to ask you about that, that the \$2.5 billion was needed in base funding to ensure the stability of the sector. Only half of that was allocated by the government. Of that amount that was allocated by the government, there was \$8 million that was dedicated to the Postsecondary Mental Health Action Plan over three years—\$8 million over three years translates into \$2.7 million per year; 47 colleges and universities in the province. When you do the math, it turns out that colleges and universities on a per-institution basis will get about \$57,000 additional funding for direct student supports in campus mental health.

I wondered—first I'm going to start with Conestoga Students Inc.—your perspective on the need for campus mental health supports and whether an additional \$57,000 per institution is going to address the spike in student mental health concerns that campuses are experiencing.

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: Thank you for the question, MPP Sattler. I don't think \$57,000 per institution per year is enough, to be honest. For us, what we think a mental health framework should include in general is based on some of the work that the Mental Health Commission of Canada has done in the National Standard for Mental

Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students, which includes things like minimal requirements of standards to ensure consistent health support across all post-secondary institutions; cyclical review requirements and ensuring frameworks remain up to date and in tune to student needs; a combination of programs, services and resources that provide culturally appropriate support methods and ensure students' individual needs are being met; review of existing current policies and procedures with a mental health lens; resource allocation; plan ensuring available financial employee support; standard evaluation; report requirements on identified frameworks to student body and ministry; and requires creation of a specific committee or task force to oversee frameworks, ideation, creation and implementation.

When we put all these into consideration over the kind of work that needs to be done for institutions to implement this mental health framework across all of Ontario, \$57,000 is not enough to do that.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much. The other concern that you raised was around the lack of any mention of consultation with students or anyone else on campuses regarding the development of these three policies. I wondered if you can elaborate a little bit about your concerns when legislation does not direct the involvement of students or anyone in the campus community in the development of policy. In fact, this legislation just allows the policy to be prescribed by the minister through a ministerial directive. So can you talk about why it's important to have consultation with students and others in the campus community?

0930

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: I think, for us at CSI, as you all know, our mandate is to our students. Anything we do is directed by students because they've elected us. They've put us in our position to represent them and be their voices at all levels of advocacy that we do.

Students have current lived experiences that are directly impacted by this framework and policy. There are so many internal and external factors that make certain situations ever-changing, and so their input must be factored in to ensure that it is timely and current and meeting their needs in the current time.

My executive director at CSI likes to say that there's never a dull moment in student governments, and I agree. That's because it's ever-changing, and we know that that's the way policies in government work too. And so, it's important that when these frameworks and policies are being created it's coming from trusted bodies of students in student governing bodies like myself and OTSU here, to ensure that we are contributing to the policies and making sure that they meet our student needs. It's important that we're not just putting policies in place to look good, that they're actually putting policies in place with the right consultation from the right stakeholders to make them more impactful for the people that they're meant to affect.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Your comments on the importance of student consultation, that would apply both for the

mental health policy and the policy on racism and hate on campus?

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: It absolutely is. Student governing bodies like ourselves have access to student groups who would be willing to come in as focus groups to serve in these consultations for these policies.

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

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: So for both the mental health and the anti-racism policies, it's important to bring them in too, as well.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: And you mentioned the regulation that was included in the legislated requirement for sexual violence and harassment policy on campus. Can you talk about that regulation?

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: To the best of my knowledge, that regulation actually mandates that student input is required in the creation of those policies on campus. And what we've seen at CSI, at least specifically at Conestoga College, is that our department of sexual and gender-based violence and college administration have consulted with our advocacy department and student groups through CSI to make sure that their policies are robust and actually fit the needs of what they need to be done.

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

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): The next round of questions will be the independent member. MPP Clancy, proceed.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I just want to thank all of you for coming. I know what it felt like when I was in undergrad to come to Toronto. Maybe it's old news for you, but I think making it here today and putting yourselves forward and sharing your experiences is commendable and really shows your character.

I just wanted to start with Sarah. I'm really disappointed to hear that you were talked out of making a complaint. When you think about the steps that need to be taken so that a student in your position won't experience this going forward—you know, a policy is a piece of paper, but what do you think is needed in terms of staffing and capacity-building on your campus to raise that experience up to meet the severity of what's going on?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I'm not sure I'm best positioned to speak about staffing capacity and funding in that regard.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: That's okay. My hope would be that whoever you met with would understand that something had to be done. So I think we need to rise the boats so that, whether it's an anonymous complaint or a complaint with names, we have processes for all the types of disclosures and complaints that would happen and that there would be a bar of expectations across the campus. That's kind of what I was considering. Right?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: Yes, sorry. I think, at this point, a lot of us have reached the point of exhaustion because these types of incidents are happening on a weekly basis, and it's unrealistic—you have to pick your battles, ultimately, and be strategic. As a student in student

government and student leadership, you have to be strategic about deciding when to take something higher up, especially because we also do want the support and cooperation of other campus groups and of university administration with us. So it's nuanced. It's difficult to decide: "Am I going to take this higher or is it a waste of my time?" because historically nothing happens, and I have to study and I have to work.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: No, fair enough. You only have a certain amount of battery, right? But yes, I think one of the hopes that I'd like to see is that these policies be matched with adequate funding and consultation with students that recognizes your contributions.

I'm going to go to Nelson, if you have a minute. I found your group really great. I think you were one of the first groups I met with in Kitchener when first elected, so you're accessible. What would you like to see with the government going forward? We've been asking—I assume that you weren't consulted in the development of this bill. Is that fair to say? Were you consulted in the shaping of Bill 166?

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: We made a written submission before this, but no, we weren't consulted on the creation of this bill.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Just through the committee? Okay.

So going forward, I know young people are always—you shouldn't have to fight to be at the table, right? I think you guys have done a good job of putting yourselves forward to be here today. What would you like to see going forward?

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Because I guess the concern is that with these directives coming from the minister if they don't include the voices of students, that's a miss. What would you like to see the government do going forward to ensure your voice is loud and equal?

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: I think, like we said before, it's just understanding that the student voice is important in the creation of this bill. So reaching out to student governing bodies like OTSU and also CSI—even the student governing body at the University of Guelph—will be important in the creation and solidification of this bill to make sure that the student voice is being heard and represented in the policy being presented.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to the second round of government questions. MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to come out and share your thoughts, perspectives and experiences with us.

My questions will be for Conestoga Students Inc., so Nelson. I just wanted to share with you that I was the former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Most recently, I've moved over to the education portfolio, but I actually spent about a year touring colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes across the province, including Conestoga College, where I met with students and I met with the mental health workers

and support services at Conestoga, just to get a better understanding of the services that are available at Conestoga to students.

So I wanted to just let you know that one of the top priorities of Minister Dunlop and of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is always around supporting post-secondary students' mental health and well-being and creating the right conditions to help young people succeed and be successful in their academic journey. I just wanted to share with you that last year, in 2023-24, we invested \$32.1 million, and that included supports for the Mental Health Services Grant, the Mental Health Worker Grant, services such as Good2Talk, which we fund, and something called Get A-Head, which is a software program that is a virtual, app-based mental health service that's available to all students across the province. I just wanted to make sure that you were aware of that.

And then, I guess we've heard a lot from university students. We had some consultations yesterday, and it's great that we're going to get a college perspective as well today, so thank you again. I'm just wondering if you can tell us if you believe that there's a difference between how some of the issues related to discrimination, related to mental health, are different on a university campus versus a college campus.

0940

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: That's a good question. I think I will say that I can't speak for my university colleagues on the way issues are being handled on their campuses, but I can say, specifically on Conestoga College campuses, that issues of hate and discrimination for us, during my term, have stemmed around anti-LGBTQ and anti-immigration rhetoric. We've been able to deal with that internally in our campuses, but also through a lot of education and creation of community, through clubs and events that promote things like our diversity week that promotes different diverse cultures and shows people, "Hey, we have different people coming from different countries. Come learn more about their cultures and be educated about it."

I think the difference I would see, the only difference that I would surmise between colleges and universities, is maybe the amount of time that is spent within the program in universities and colleges. Universities are typically around four years for a degree, and on our college campuses, it's anywhere from one to four years, based on the diploma or if you're doing a degree as well. So the churn rate is much higher at our college campuses, and so that might affect any instances of hate or discrimination that we see, but it doesn't change the fact that our college works really hard to nip it in the bud when it comes up.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: You mentioned in your remarks—you talked about mental health and mental health supports. Part of the intention of this legislation is to create standards for mental health supports at colleges and universities. So I'm wondering if you can share your thoughts and perspectives about how you think setting minimum standards across the sector so that, regardless if you go to college in Kitchener or you're attending university in Peterborough,

those same standards of care are available. So just your thoughts on those minimum standards and consistency of service levels.

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: Yes, of course. I think, like I mentioned before, one of the things that we at CSI appreciate is the Mental Health Commission of Canada's national standard for mental health and well-being for post-secondary. It provides institutions a guide to follow for the framework, and we think this is a good way to standardize it across Ontario as well. It includes things like the minimum requirements to ensure consistent health supports across all post-secondary institutions. There is a cyclical review requirement, ensuring the framework remains up to date and in tune with student needs; a combination of programs, services and resources that provide culturally appropriate support methods and ensure students' individual needs are being met; continuously reviewing policies and procedures with a mental health lens; standard evaluation and reporting requirements on identified frameworks to the student body and ministry; and clear creation of a specific committee or a task force to oversee the framework's ideation, creation and implementation.

That last one is especially important, because like our colleagues at OTSU have said, if we're creating a committee or task force to oversee the framework's ideation, creation and implementation across institutions all across Ontario, then it should definitely include individuals from racialized and marginalized groups, community members and people who are experts in mental health and the mental health space—

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

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: —to make sure that the policies that are being created in all of these institutions are in line with what is needed for the students in that community as well.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you to all of our presenters this morning. I have a very quick question for Sarah. My colleague mentioned there are some mental health supports that the government is funding on campus. In your situation, did you seek any mental health supports and did it help you process everything that has gone on?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I've sought mental health supports within our organization. Within Hillel, there is a hired mental health professional whose role is to support students on campus through a culturally informed lens. She's Jewish as well. So yes, I've found support with her but not through a provincially funded program.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: It—

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'll now move to the second round of questioning for the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I now want to turn to OTSU, and ask you some more questions both about your presentation

today, but also about OUSA's recommendations. We received a presentation from OUSA yesterday and they set out some of the same recommendations that you had.

OUSA, when they made their presentation yesterday, provided a context that almost half of universities in Ontario right now are in deficit positions—very financially precarious. You talked about the fundamental importance of mandatory training for staff who are providing mental health supports, who are responding to disclosures of racism and hate, and who are doing that important work on campus to support students.

When a university is in such a financially precarious situation, oftentimes it's those student support services that are first to be cut. We know from COU, from the Council of Ontario Universities, that universities are spending over \$1 billion on student support services on campus.

So can you give us a sense of what kinds of delays students may face currently in accessing the mental health services that are available at Ontario Tech related to the instability of the funding situation?

Ms. Samantha Brown: Yes, of course. Even before the start of my term—I was a student at Ontario Tech—it's about six months of wait time. It depends on the type of counselling or support that you need. So if you're going to the student mental health services, it can be six to eight weeks of waiting. It depends on if you need specialized care, if you're going just for a specific intake, whether trying to figure out what kind of care you need, what kind of support you need, how often you may need it, if you need to go externally for it—so that's also another barrier. And then another one would be if you have any sort of accessibility needs, so that's language accessibility. If you prefer to speak about the things that you are experiencing in your first language if you need some sort of assisted technology if you maybe can't come in person because our students are commuter students as well. If you are a student that is not constantly on campus or you can't reference the care directly on campus, then talking about booking for online and how that's different and how students don't always know how to get that access.

The other thing with wait times, as well, is the student union also offers mental health services, trying to work in tandem when the university does not have access to things because they're struggling with funding, where we can also work as a campus community in trying to rebalance and trying to figure out more resources for students but also more culturally relevant resources for students, because the other thing with access is if the service and the care is not culturally relevant, that care is not actually accessible for the student body, and that's not care maybe that they're actually seeking to use. Talking about the Western understanding of medicine, the Western understanding of mental health, they may not be applicable to all of our students and how that may not be something that students are seeking out because they inherently know that about the system already.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Right. Thank you very much for that response.

And given that this legislation doesn't say anything about consultation with students—it says that there must be a policy and that the content can be determined with a directive from the minister—do you have confidence that this legislation will enable that kind of culturally responsive student support services that are so important for students? And do you have confidence that the mental health needs of students will be able to be met when there are such little additional resources attached to this legislation?

Ms. Samantha Brown: I think consultation right now is where we're trying to be. We've passed the point where we could have had consultations with students individually. A lot of what we talk about as a student union is that we're mandated by the students, and it's also what Conestoga Students Inc. was saying as well. We are mandated by students, and we're here for students.

0950

Students are doing finals right now. It's also the timing of things and location. They're not able to physically be here. So consultation where there is reference to student unions, there's reference to student organization—students who are municipally and provincially and also federally already involved in organizations referencing those students because they have the time; also, the aspect that they, a lot of the time, are being paid to be in those spaces.

There are students, like you were saying, who have to work to be there. Ontario Tech is one of those schools where students have—this is like their entry to post-secondary education. Maybe they are first-gen—understanding that also as a barrier for students to be able to participate in consultation.

So that's where we step in, where we are trying to be there for students in things that we do with consultation with them, to be able to speak where they cannot speak and be where they cannot be—and things that we've spoken to them about, concerns that they've raised and obviously campaigns that they have also raised, and then also collaborating with lobbying organizations like OUSA.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Did you want to add to that?

Ms. Angelique Dack: Just to add briefly, that doesn't discount opening up public consultation for students who don't organize under a student union. We've heard from a lot of students on the standing committee, on their opinions of the bill, and having an open forum similar to other legislation that allows for public consultation—to allow students to submit to that gives them that opportunity if they don't organize formally with us.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you.

Sarah, I saw you nodding, and you actually referenced the culturally responsive counselling services and how important that was for your own well-being. Can you elaborate a little bit more about the value and importance of culturally relevant or responsive student support services?

Ms. Sarah Golombek: I think it's paramount that professionals on campus, whether they're mental health professionals or faculty or administration, are adequately

trained on working with various student populations, at the very minimum. We had advocated to our office of diversity and human rights that there should be training that's mandated for all university staff and faculty about anti-Semitism, about what it looks like and how to spot it. I really do think that education is lacking for university staff and health providers in terms of cultural competency and sensitivity. There definitely is room for education.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to the second and final round for the independent member. MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to start with a question for Ontario Tech Student Union. Thank you so much for coming.

We hear about these funding shortages on university campuses and college campuses. How do you experience that as a student?

Ms. Angelique Dack: Again, it shows up in the wait times that students have for mental health services. Then, the work still needs to be done, and our students find alternative ways to get what they need, so they go to different departments who don't necessarily have the training in order to be counsellors. They go to their Indigenous centre, they go to their DEI offices, where they might have some of that training but not necessarily what a mental health counsellor can provide—so by expanding what we define as “student mental health services” also offers more availability to funding to support students of diverse backgrounds.

To answer your question, it just makes wait times a lot longer. If a student is struggling mentally because university is a very emotionally exhausting experience, there are a lot of implications that could have, at the end of the day, that we don't want to see from our students.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I wonder if you can share a little bit more about, going forward, how the ministry can consult with students to make sure that there's a culturally responsive policy. I wonder if you can speak to that. I thought that was a great point—that we have a spot online where we could do ERO submissions and put a written statement forward. That's kind of what you're hoping to see more of going forward, that voice—the opportunity for all students to speak. Can you share a bit more about why that's important?

Ms. Samantha Brown: I think it's important—also looking at how students interact with their student experience. Not every student is part of their student government or is part of their student association—so looking at consultation as people talking to people and moving forward with that aspect of understanding for accessibility for students. Rooms like this are something that Angelique and I are very privy to; we're used to being in rooms like this. That may not be the experience of an everyday student, and looking at lenses from outside of our own perspective—just talking to people who have experiences that are different than yours—is critical to being able to do work like this.

A lot of what I say even in my role is that talking to someone with an opinion that is different from mine is me

doing my work because it's me hearing and listening to something else that I do not normally hear. So pulling yourself out of a group or a bubble or something that you wouldn't necessarily be in is relevant to being able to do policy work that is meaningful because policy impacts everybody, regardless of if they're in the room or not. So why not bring them into that room?

It's also that aspect of the fact that people are not, maybe, able to access that room, so the more diverse experiences that you're able to bring in, whether it's through training, whether it's through lived experience, whether it's through conversations that you have just in the hallway—formalizing those practices and making sure that they are always something that we do and not just a check box, and making sure that we are having meaningful conversations with people to be able to implement that into our policies and procedures.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And you shared a good word, "impact."

When I think about Conestoga and the other post-secondary institutions in our region, Nelson, they're so unique, you know? We can't paint them all with one brush. I guess that's part of the concern about a directive coming from the minister, maybe without the same consultation that we're talking about here. How do you see Conestoga needing a Conestoga approach to some of these policies?

Mr. Nelson Chukwuma: I think it speaks directly to a couple of the things that my colleagues here have spoken about. It's really, again, making sure that the student voices are being heard through these consultations, including the student governing bodies and getting students who maybe don't identify with being members of CSI but are in the community, as well. Collaborating with not just Conestoga, but with the University of Waterloo and Laurier, since we're all in the same region, to see, "What programs and services and mental health frameworks do you have that we could maybe build together to make sure that we have a cohesive unit in the Waterloo region, in particular?"

And so, I encourage that and—

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

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank Nelson, Sarah, Angelique and Samantha for presenting to us this morning. That concludes our business this morning.

We'll stand in recess until 3 p.m.

The committee recessed from 0958 to 1500.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good afternoon, everyone. We're now going to resume consideration of public hearings for Bill 166.

I want to thank our two presenters that are with us. There is, as well, a delegation online who will join us in a few minutes. Each presenter will have seven minutes to make a presentation. At the final minute mark, I'll interject briefly just to let you know that there's one minute remaining in your presentation. After we've heard from all three presenters, we'll then go in rotation between the members of the committee. We'll have two rounds of

seven-and-a-half minutes of questions and one round of four-and-a-half minutes for a total of 39 minutes.

I'm just going to remind everyone to speak clearly and slowly. I would ask you, at the start of your presentation, to identify yourself by name for the purposes of Hansard.

MCMASTER STUDENTS UNION
INVEST IN POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION INTER-UNIVERSITY
COALITION
B'NAI BRITH CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): If everybody is ready to go, I'll first call on the McMaster Students Union, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Abigail, your seven minutes begins now.

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Good afternoon, all, and thank you to the Chair and the committee for your time and consideration of the McMaster Students Union's feedback to Bill 166.

My name is Abigail Samuels. I use she/her pronouns, and I am the vice-president, education, and corporate officer for the McMaster Students Union, representing the voices of 27,000 full-time undergraduate students at McMaster. Additionally, the MSU is also a proud member of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, a.k.a. OUSA, which represents 160,000 students across Ontario and have appeared before this committee as well. We strive for a post-secondary education system in Ontario that is affordable, accessible, high-quality and accountable to students.

Our first suggestion today is amending section 6(b) of the mental health policy to mandate institutions to reassess their policies every two years instead of every five. Given the potential for swift fluctuations in the socio-political and economic landscape, students' mental health requirements undergo frequent changes. Consequently, regulatory frameworks governing mental health provisions must maintain flexibility in order for institutions to devise strategies that effectively cater to student needs.

Adhering to a five-year review cycle, as proposed in the current draft of the bill, means that within the span of a four-year university degree or a two-year college diploma, students may not see well-needed changes reflected within their time at the institution. Again, this poses a risk of institutional frameworks becoming obsolete and failing to adequately address students' needs and concerns, thereby compromising the quality and accessibility of mental health services during critical periods.

Secondly, the MSU is advocating for increased clarity within the bill to prevent withholding of institutional funding in cases of non-compliance with the ministerial directive. Given the current financial challenges faced by post-secondary institutions, there remains a substantial journey ahead to ensure financial stability. Introducing provisions in this bill that allow for retraction of funding due to non-compliance with ministerial directives would exacerbate financial strain, jeopardizing students' access

to essential services and institutions' capacity to provide them. Instead, exploring alternative avenues for recourse, such as involving an external body to address ministerial directives, would be more prudent.

While considering pressures associated with administering mental health supports and services, we also have to recognize that demand has also shifted from periodic to heightened and sustained throughout the year. In previous years, wellness centres have indicated that they could anticipate episodic demand for mental health services based on the academic calendar or time of year, as students experience during exams and while adapting to living away from home.

However, according to the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, institutions have begun to indicate that they are not equipped to manage sustained demand without additional support. The growth in demand for support services amongst PSE students, along with increasing complexity of need, is a strain to institutional resources and capacity.

Institutions have increased their spending on mental health and other wellness services significantly over the past several years, but the status quo is unsustainable and they need additional support. The government should expand funding to enable colleges and universities to fully leverage sector partnerships, expand data collection and service capacity and meet students' and institutional support needs.

Students and professionals in student affairs have also pointed out—a wide variety—a need for mental health workers and culturally tailored services, such as counselling offered in languages other than English, therapies intertwined with spiritual practices and Indigenous programs. While many people have highlighted these concerns, they have also observed that in recent years, their institutions have undertaken various initiatives to provide services through an equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization lens, thereby enhancing the cultural relevance of mental health service and delivery.

In looking at limitations for funding for the post-secondary education sector to provide adequate mental health supports, we also look to the broader community, where hospitals are bottlenecked with patient caseloads that exceed staffing ability. Using a stepped care approach provides a framework for the care of individuals with significant mental health concerns that uses limited resources to their greatest effect on a population basis. Stepped care requires treatments of differing intensities. For example, there are less intensive treatments such as brief therapies, group treatments and self-help approaches.

At McMaster University, the Black Student Success Centre aims to combine the two of these things. We offer culturally relevant support as well as a variety of support mechanisms that vary based off of your need.

Community-based resources frequently fill gaps of on-campus services and complement institutional support systems, especially for international students who may require health care in their native language or within a culturally sensitive treatment environment. Leveraging

community support becomes crucial in providing culturally relevant assistance where institutions are unable to do so.

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

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Lastly, within the section of addressing racism and hate, the MSU recommends establishing a provincial advisory committee consisting of racialized and religious students, faculty, staff, administrators and community leaders. The involvement of leaders and persons who have first-hand experience is crucial to the development of institutional policies, making them more robust and attuned to students' needs. Students prioritize a community-centred approach to shaping institutional policies, and the establishment of such a community at a provincial level would facilitate the creation of more impactful policies aimed at combatting racism and hate on campus.

Overall, Bill 166 is a positive step towards supporting students at the institutional level through formal policies and standardized processes. We hope that with the aforementioned recommendations, this bill can be strengthened to integrate more equity and accountability into these anticipated policies. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now ask our two presenters who will be joining us online to make your presentation. That group is the Invest in Post-Secondary Education Inter-University Coalition. I'm not sure, Samer or Natasha, which one starts first. I would ask whoever begins your presentation to introduce yourself for the purposes of Hansard. Your seven minutes will begin.

Ms. Natasha Pravaz: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. We will share our seven minutes.

My name is Natasha Pravaz. I use she/her pronouns, and I am one of the co-creators of the Invest in Post-Secondary Education Inter-University Coalition. We're a group of concerned faculty on campuses across the province, actually, who have been witnessing the devastating results of consistent underfunding of post-secondary education.

The bottom line is that the lack of appropriate funds across the sector is causing Ontario's post-secondary institutions to become financially unsustainable, which is the single most important factor, I would highlight, affecting the sector's ability to adequately respond to students' mental health, equity and human rights, and the one that the province has jurisdiction over.

The policies and frameworks that Bill 166 seeks to develop around mental health and anti-racism are actually already in place, so they are redundant. What is lacking is provincial funding for these areas, at a time of mounting financial pressures. The bill would introduce extra, unnecessary red tape when the resources needed on our campuses are already so sorely depleted—resources that would support the sector's sustained efforts and systems already in place to address increased rates of anxiety, depression, stress and complex trauma, as well as to help survivors of systemic forms of exclusion and privilege

such as white supremacy, transphobia, rape culture and settler-colonial violence.

As the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario recently stated in its January report on student mental health best practices in Ontario, “Long-term planning is complicated by current funding structures ... which impede efficiency, impact service provision and contribute to staff turnover.”

1510

You see, these two areas that the bill so neatly separates are really deeply intertwined. In fact, Black advocacy groups have been demanding that racism be declared a public health crisis. However, we have not seen responses from this government based on what the community organizations and stakeholders have been telling us all along. This misguided approach to both anti-racism and mental health shows the lack of expert critics advising the ministry, and any policies that would be instituted without the expertise of those who have worked in these sectors for decades will bring more problems in the end.

Our equity, diversity, inclusion and justice offices are just as depleted as the mental health units in this sector. For example, having two EDI staff in a campus with a student population of 20,000 students is equivalent to treating a deep wound with a Band-Aid and no antibiotic cream. Of course results will be less than ideal.

Approaching racism and hate as systemic problems means properly funding the offices with the expertise to do so. Since anti-Semitism is a form of racism, it must be opposed in solidarity with other anti-racist struggles. Instead, imposing directives not guided by best practices in the sector will prioritize needs of one group over another and end up exacerbating the problem. I am afraid our campuses may well become a cesspool of hate, and we would not want to have Bill 166 blamed for that.

We cannot treat racism with a bullet. Human rights offices are moving away from carceral and punitive approaches to justice, favouring instead restorative approaches that draw on the local knowledge of the Indigenous justice systems, which work on addressing the roots of harm and on rehabilitating those who cause harm. This approach helps to decolonize our institutions, and just as the stepped care model in mental health was just mentioned, it emphasizes the need for decentralized client- and survivor-led approaches that equitably empower all of our students who are currently suffering.

Thank you. I’m going to pass the word to Samer.

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: Thank you very much. I am Samer Al-Kiswany, a co-creator.

I would like to add that the protection of the universities from political interference is legally enshrined in the university acts and is internationally recognized to be a cornerstone of democracy. University autonomy safeguards academic freedom and the development of rigorous and critical research and education. These are key principles that Ontario adopted more than 100 years ago and have been celebrated by all parties.

Bill 166 is an unprecedented attempt from the government to undermine the fundamentals of the democratic

system. Let’s look into two questions. First, is this bill really needed? The answer is no. Ontario universities already employ clear and comprehensive policies that prohibit all forms of harassment and discrimination. Universities have strong processes in place to create safe and inclusive learning environments that are underpinned by the right to free speech and academic freedom. Policies are regularly reviewed and updated. Importantly, the current processes are transparent. What is needed is adequate funding to support the current processes.

The second question I want to examine is: Is the bill supported by the communities that this bill is supposed to help? Shockingly, no. Bill 166 is presented as a bill to fight Islamophobia, yet members of the Muslim community are actively campaigning against it. Bill 166 is aimed to fight anti-Semitism, yet Jewish faculty and members of the Jewish community are arguing against the bill. Student groups are voicing their concern that they are not being consulted for this bill.

Furthermore, the bill is presented as a response to recent incidents, yet it fails to name anti-Palestinian racism in the bill. This is despite the alarming increase in anti-Palestinian racism on and off campus. The Palestinian community as well is campaigning against this bill. So if this bill does not have wide support across these communities then who is this bill really for?

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

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: Let me be clear: We really need to support and properly fund work on mental health and anti-racism, but this work should be based on advice from experts and the affected communities, and without infringing on universities’ autonomy. It is hard to see how powers to regulate universities by directives will not expand in the future and completely gut the idea of university autonomy. Perhaps this is the point, to begin with non-controversial issues and empower the minister to later issue directives about other matters, including what topics can be taught or researched on campuses. That is why this bill represents an existential threat to Ontario universities.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Our third presenter, B’nai Brith Canada. Richard, can you introduce yourself for the purpose of Hansard? Your seven minutes begins now.

Mr. Richard Robertson: Thank you, committee members, for providing me with the opportunity to make submissions on this important bill. My name is Richard Robertson, and I’m here on behalf of B’nai Brith Canada, this country’s oldest human rights organization and the voice of Canada’s grassroots Jewish community. Our organization, which was established in 1875, is dedicated to eradicating racism, anti-Semitism and hatred in all its forms and championing the rights of the marginalized.

Bill 166, in its present form, has the capacity to be a tool through which the Legislature can take meaningful steps to curb the concerning and sustained rise in anti-Semitic incidents presently plaguing campuses across the province. To assist this esteemed committee in its efforts

to ensure that the final rendition of the legislation is the strongest possible version, B'nai Brith makes two recommendations. The two recommendations are explored in greater detail in our written brief submitted this morning.

Our first recommendation is that the committee recommend that the minister issue a directive upon the act's coming into force. The directive shall inform the institutions under the minister's jurisdiction that compliance with section 20 of the act requires that the institutions' rules and policies to be developed under the act use the provincial definition of anti-Semitism, which is the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. Such a recommendation will ensure that the province's post-secondary institutions are able to address all the potential forms of anti-Semitism that are presently being experienced by Jewish post-secondary students. It is the submission of B'nai Brith Canada that utilizing the IHRA definition to confront anti-Semitism on campus was exactly the type of application of the definition that the executive council envisioned when they chose to recommend its adoption via an order in council.

It is our further submission that, considering its adoption in 2020, the implementation of the IHRA definition by way of a ministerial directive prescribing its usage by post-secondary institutions in the province as they develop policies and rules to address anti-Semitism on their campuses is not controversial. Rather, it is within the spirit of the order in council and is a logical way to ensure a uniform approach to identifying and preventing anti-Semitism on campuses and for effecting consequences against those who engage in anti-Semitic conduct.

It could be argued that it would be contentious to allow Ontario's post-secondary institutions to utilize any other definition of anti-Semitism when developing their policies and rules. If the definition of anti-Semitism which the vast majority of the province's Jewish post-secondary students say most comprehensively encapsulates all the forms of anti-Jewish hate they are subjected to as post-secondary students is not utilized to develop the policies that are intended to protect them, then how can Jewish individuals trust that the proposed measures will have the intended effect they desire to seek? Utilizing a definition of anti-Semitism that does not enable the protection against the forms of hate that Ontario's Jewish post-secondary students attest is compromising their safety and well-being makes the inclusion of anti-Semitism in the proposed legislation a redundant exercise.

Further, we submit that this committee is not the right forum for debate on the IHRA definition. The definition has already been adopted by the province via an order in council. To make rulings on its merits is *ultra vires* the scope of this committee. Concerns about the definition should be raised in the Legislature and addressed by the executive council.

B'nai Brith's second recommendation is that the committee avail the minister of the ability to effect compliance through the addition of a subsection to the proposed section 20. This subsection would allow the minister to issue notice, in the form of a ministerial directive, of their intention to take action in regard to institutions that are not

in compliance with section 20. The additional subsection would mirror subsection 19(4)(b) of the proposed legislation.

1520

In addition, the committee can recommend that the minister utilize the provision to issue directives informing institutions who do not comply with section 20 of the minister's intent to pause the provision of provincial funds to an institution who is in breach of their obligations under section 20. The addition of such a subsection would provide teeth to section 20.

The subsection would have the capacity to act in a similar fashion to Title VI of the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI provides that if a recipient of federal funding is found to have discriminated against a person or group of persons on the basis of an enumerated ground and does not voluntarily perfect compliance, the agency providing the financial assistance has the ability to terminate funding.

Title VI has been used by government and community leaders to compel post-secondary institutions to take meaningful steps to combat hatred and racism on their campuses or risk losing their public funding. Title VI has been employed by the United States' department of education to serve a remedial function. Such legislation need not be used in a punitive manner.

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

Mr. Richard Robertson: In Ontario, if the recommended subsection were added to the proposed legislation, the minister could declare their intent to halt provincial funding to post-secondary institutions under their jurisdiction that are not in compliance with the requirements imposed on them by section 20 of the act. Once compliance with the requirements was perfected, the funding could be reinstated.

Subject to any questions, those are our submissions.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you to our presenters.

The question period will begin with a seven-and-a-half-minute round for the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank all three of our presenters, those who are here in person and also those who are online.

I wanted to start out with some questions for the MSU. You reinforced many of the points that were made in the OUSA delegation that we received yesterday, so that was very much appreciated.

One of the issues that you raised is the fact that universities are seeing much more sustained and constant demand for mental health services from students. It's no longer episodic, and so this increases the demands on the student mental health support services to be able to respond appropriately. And you pointed out the need for additional funding to deliver those support services.

This bill was accompanied by an announcement of some additional funding. The government has committed \$8 million for the Postsecondary Mental Health Action Plan over three years, which means \$2.7 million per year;

divided by 47 institutions, that means \$57,000 average additional funding for each of our colleges and universities in the province.

In the face of this increased demand that universities are seeing, do you think that this funding that accompanies this bill is anywhere near what is needed to have effective mental health supports for students on campus?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: To that, I would say a very strong no. I recognize the fiscal environment that not just colleges and universities are in, but the province is in, that the country of Canada and the world is in, and I recognize that everybody comes to the table asking for more money. However, considering the fact that you are most likely to develop mental health illness between the ages of 16 and 24, it puts students, particularly who are also consequently experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity while juggling the pressures of academic performance and postgrad prospects—it creates a perfect storm for mental health issues to manifest, and with that, we're seeing students having more of a difficult time in completing their education.

With such a rapidly aging population, it is so important, as a country and as a province, that we continue to support our students and ensure that the future is secure—because we are not only the present, but we are the future, so to that, we need funding that will be able to adequately support us so that we can in turn support you.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This morning, we had some presentations from other campus student organizations, and they really talked about the value and importance of student consultation in the development of policies on campuses. This bill empowers the minister to issue directives as to what these policies shall contain and doesn't make any mention of consultation with students or with faculty or with staff or with community or with experts—no reference to consultation at all.

Can you tell us how important it would be for policies to be successful, if there is consultation with those who are affected by the policy—either on the receiving end or delivering the supports that are outlined?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: It's incredibly important that students' voices are kept at the centre of the table while we're making these decisions. Unfortunately, the landscape in which students are going to school, currently, differs greatly compared to the climate in which all of you had gone to school. With that, it's incredibly important that we're listening directly to the people who are affected and we're listening to those who know the story best, to ensure that the policy that we're putting in will adequately address the needs of students.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Your first recommendation, I think, was around penalties for non-compliance that are set out in this legislation—which was a question I asked the minister when she was here: What does she intend for the consequences for non-compliance? We didn't get an answer.

You talked about the necessity of not withdrawing funding as a penalty for non-compliance. Can you elaborate on why you feel that's so important?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Given the fiscal environment that universities and colleges are in, their inability to meet ministerial directives may not entirely be because they do not want to meet them, but that they do not have the monetary resources in order to meet them.

With that in mind, we're hoping that the punishment for not being able to carry out a directive because they don't have enough money is not to take away more money from them, which is why I had suggested that we explore alternative avenues for recourse, such as involving an external body to address ministerial directives.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: How much time do we have?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute and 20 seconds.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Around culturally responsive mental health supports—tell us more about why that would be so important to have access to on campus.

Ms. Abigail Samuels: This is my favourite question.

As I had alluded to within my seven-minute speech: I had also spoken about the Black Student Success Centre at McMaster University. The Black Student Success Centre is one of the first of its kind in offering holistic support for our Black students at McMaster. It has been an incredible success.

We understand that the way that mental health both manifests and the way that we seek supports is affected by both culture and social impacts. With that, it's incredibly important that the supports that are offered within such a diverse province, especially as we've seen a very drastic emphasis on international student recruitment—is having the supports available to be able to take care of students. Considering the social differences that there may be, considering the language barriers, it's incredibly important for a student to be able to feel safe and feel seen.

I personally have had experiences—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to the next round of questions. The independent member has four and a half minutes to begin.

1530

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I wanted to start off by asking Invest in Post-Secondary Education Inter-University Coalition—I'll ask Natasha. I know you talked about what experts are saying is needed in terms of tackling racism. I assume you have some expertise in this area, and I know that we're looking for expertise in this area. So I wonder if you could share a little bit of what you think the solution could be to addressing hate on campus.

Ms. Natasha Pravaz: Thank you so much for your question. Yes, to begin with, let me speak a little bit about the way in which this bill is framed, with at least 25 references to ministerial directives. These will allow for political interference in university affairs and violations of university autonomy. So these directives actually represent an unprecedented intrusion into the normal activities of self-governing institutions.

The ministry should not have the power to be issuing these directives that can interfere with the university's ability to conduct their internal affairs because the independence and institutional autonomy of these institu-

tions are protected in the Ontario universities act and are core principles in all individual university acts. The fact that the government won't fully fund the universities to pursue the mental health and anti-racism policies that are already in place but yet wants to control them through these top-down mechanisms is very problematic.

I want to emphasize that the autonomy of universities is internationally recognized as necessary to protect research and education from interference. This is also a cornerstone of democracy. If we are not protecting our autonomy, we can say that our democracy is not being protected.

These directives are taken from correctional services. This is an unheard-of degree of political interference, and it's going to fail to allow us to do the work that we need to do in mental health and anti-racism. I want to say that the best things that we could be doing instead would be: to fully support mental health and racism by restoring the funding to post-secondary institutions that we need for culturally responsive mental health supports that have been talked about and equity offices that are qualified to do this work; to use, secondly, the powers of the Anti-Racism Act, 2017, to re-establish the Anti-Racism Directorate's subcommittees on Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism, all of which this government disbanded; and the third would be to ensure that the public is involved in building strong anti-racist communities.

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

Ms. Natasha Pravaz: I want to talk about how universities already have EDI strategic plans that have been approved by our governance structures but just can't be operationalized because of lack of funds. There's a report of the congress action organization that consulted across the sector, and one of their calls to action is to institute proper funding, if we're serious about this work, and to immediately began to support EDI offices and leaders in ways that enable them to do the work that we need to do.

Mental health supports still heavily depend on unpaid and underpaid labour of precariously employed students, rather than on trained mental health staff with specific EDI mandates in their roles that are hired. We need non-precarious positions.

Ultimately, I also want to talk about multi-faith teams that work on our campuses and not being university staff. We need them to be staffed in order to be able to navigate the complaints that they have been receiving. There's a disconnect. If we have the funding, then they will be working within the university structure.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We will now move to the government's round of questioning, seven and a half minutes: MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to begin by thanking everyone for being here today. Although virtually, I know this is still time away from things that you could be doing otherwise, so I truly appreciate your investment in our discussions.

I'm going to be focusing most of my conversation with Richard at B'nai Brith because I want to ask him about his organization. You talked about a lot—a few points about what you've been doing since 1985, is it? But, given you're here today, what do you offer the students who come to you?

Mr. Richard Robertson: Absolutely. B'nai Brith has been in existence in Canada since 1875, just a point of—

Ms. Laura Smith: Oh, 1875?

Mr. Richard Robertson: Yes, just a small point of clarification. What we've been offering students is we offer them support. B'nai Brith Canada is responsible for developing the annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents. The audit for 2023 will be released shortly, later this spring. The purpose of why I'm bringing up the audit is because through our work in compiling the audit, we receive, through our 24-hour anti-hate hotline, through our anti-hate app which we've developed and through our online reporting mechanisms, instances of hate. We are often—

Ms. Laura Smith: On-campus hate?

Mr. Richard Robertson: On-campus hate, of course, MPP Smith. We receive reports of all forms of hate across all of society. Specifically, though, we have seen, especially since October 7, a rise in on-campus hate. So we receive these reports of hate incidents, and then we provide support to the students.

Ms. Laura Smith: And this is, as you said, much more significant since October 7.

So talk to me about—if you do have statistics, given the Jewish population on an average university is, what, in the GTA, 2% or 3%—making that assumption, how much would you say the incidents of hate, the anti-Semitic incidents would be on a university campus, given the small amount of students that would be Jewish?

Mr. Richard Robertson: I don't have a specific number for you, MPP Smith. But what I can suggest is that we're receiving several calls a day.

Ms. Laura Smith: Whereas you used to be receiving how many?

Mr. Richard Robertson: Several calls a week.

Ms. Laura Smith: Right. So it has increased to what extent, times what?

Mr. Richard Robertson: Exponentially.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. So your understanding—and keep in mind, you're providing information from another group or a person who calls in to you for help. What do you find is their biggest issue? Are they bringing these incidents of hate to their university campuses? What is happening?

Mr. Richard Robertson: The students are afraid, and they feel unwelcome and unsafe on campus. That feeling, we're being told, is exacerbated by the inaction or the inability they feel their campuses have to properly deal with the instances of anti-Semitism that they're raising to them.

Ms. Laura Smith: So they're not being adjudicated? They're not being dealt with?

Mr. Richard Robertson: It is the opinion of the students that they are not being dealt with in a sufficient

enough manner. One of the issues is that the universities sometimes question whether or not what the students feel is an anti-Semitic incident is indeed an anti-Semitic incident. That's partly why we are asking, as our first recommendation, that a ministerial directive be advised by this committee that would compel the universities to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, which is the most comprehensive definition of anti-Semitism.

Ms. Laura Smith: So you're saying that a centralized record or recording system does not exist, truly? Because you're saying that you look at universities and college campuses across this province and you don't see a method to the madness, so to speak.

Mr. Richard Robertson: B'nai Brith and other organizations like us are left to fill a void in students' lives because of the lack of a centralized system for the handling of anti-Semitic incidents on campuses.

Ms. Laura Smith: So if Bill 166 is passed, and I'm going to say this for not only the Jewish students but also every student who feels marginalized or put into a corner, so to speak, do you believe this is a step in the right direction when it comes to protecting against hate on campus? From what you've advised, it doesn't seem to exist. There is no protection.

Mr. Richard Robertson: Most certainly. The recognition that all universities must develop policies and rules and revisit those rules every five years is a step in the right direction. Directives from the minister and granting the minister the ability to implement directives that would compel the uniform nature of the handling of various forms of hatred and racism is a step in the right direction.

As well, B'nai Brith's second recommendation that there be consequences for universities failing to combat properly and adequately all forms of hatred on their campus would add further teeth to a bill that is already a step in the right direction.

Ms. Laura Smith: Can I ask you—we've referred to them as incidents of hate, but let's paint a picture. Can you provide a few details on what an incident of hate on an average college or university campus would look like?

1540

Mr. Richard Robertson: Certainly. B'nai Brith, since October 7, has received calls from multiple universities where mezuzahs, which is a holy Jewish artifact, had been ripped from doorframes on or in the immediate vicinity of campuses. We've had chants of genocidal slogans, such as "From the River to the Sea"—

Ms. Laura Smith: What does that mean?

Mr. Richard Robertson: That is a claim for the erasure of the State of Israel, and it also denies Jewish indigeneity to the land of Israel. Therefore, it's considered to be a genocidal slogan.

Ms. Laura Smith: What other things have you seen on campus?

Mr. Richard Robertson: We've seen horrific graffiti. Even before October 7, we saw graffiti at York University that said that Jews should be shot in the head. Since October 7, we've seen graffiti on university campuses that

said that somebody was going to go to bat for Hitler, a.k.a. finishing off the job of destroying the Jewish people.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: What would you say to a Jewish student who had to or was intending on going to university or college in the upcoming months, in September, and they were making an application or they were getting their letters right now?

Mr. Richard Robertson: Since the proposal of Bill 166, I would tell those students that I believe that there is hope for them, that they will be able to attend university and college in Ontario without fear for their well-being as a Jewish student, but that it was incumbent upon our Legislature to implore the minister with as much power to use Bill 166 to successfully ensure the safety and well-being of Jewish students on campuses across the province.

Ms. Laura Smith: And you deal with all kinds of hate, not just anti-Semitism?

Mr. Richard Robertson: Absolutely. Our mandate is to combat racism and hate in all of its forms.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the second round of questioning for the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wanted to focus my next group of questions on Invest in Post-Secondary Education Inter-University Coalition, Samer and Natasha. Natasha, you started off your presentation by referencing the devastating underfunding that the post-secondary sector has experienced and how this underfunding affects universities' abilities to support students appropriately. Can you elaborate a little bit more about what you are seeing on your campus about the kinds of mental health supports and anti-hate and racism supports that universities are able to provide to students?

Ms. Natasha Pravaz: Thank you for that question. Yes, as I started talking about, there are several ways in which the lack of funding is affecting students' ability to have their mental health needs addressed on campus. One of them was talked about by the president of the student group from McMaster regarding culturally sensitive mental health supports. These are extremely important in the communities in addressing the mental health needs of marginalized and racialized students, as well as international students.

However, because of the lack of funding, we actually do not have the capacity to sustain the support of mental health needs for complex cases, and as was also discussed already, these needs used to be fluctuating and now they're constant. So the mental health offices are flooded and there are not enough programs and peer-to-peer supports. It's a complex situation because some groups do not feel very safe in disclosing certain issues, perhaps, to mental health workers that do not have the cultural sensitivity, right? So they may have these needs addressed by a peer. However, as I mentioned before, these are also poorly compensated, so the students who are providing the support are also in a precariously employed situation.

They do not have job security; they can only provide support in a limited capacity.

Again, we are looking for a comprehensive approach, which has been advocated by the higher education quality body that I mentioned earlier. The only way in which we can do this is by reinstating funding, so this is one of those key elements that needs to be addressed.

The other issue I want to talk about is the concern around harm and around students feeling unsafe. As a faculty member, I want to be very clear that our equity, diversity, inclusion and justice offices are doing the work of addressing harassment complaints and adjudicating them, and if there are hate crimes being committed on campus, they are being addressed, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission also needs to be given enough funds to deal with the situation.

When you have underfunding all across, you have a problem, right? If we don't have the experts advising us, if we don't have the funds, it's very easy to dismiss their capacity to address the issues. So this is something really important.

As a Jewish faculty member, I want to talk a little bit about the question of discomfort and the students' subjective understanding of safety. It's really important for us to understand that feeling uncomfortable or having your beliefs challenged does not equate to hate, and it is very important for us to be able to make those distinctions. We cannot learn if we are feeling comfortable all the time. Learning is an uncomfortable process, and we will have those situations when ideas are not going to be accepted by others. It is within the context of dialogue that can only happen if our academic freedom and freedom of speech is supported on campus—which does not mean that harassment and hate speech is accepted. It is only when discomfort and having ideas challenged can happen in the classroom that learning can happen.

That's why I'm so very concerned about directives being the mode through which our relationships on campus are going to be regulated. It's a step backwards. Here we have our experts in the mental health field, in the equity, diversity and inclusion field, telling us that we need the funds to continue to do this very difficult, intricate, sensitive work that we've been engaging in, and moving away from punitive approaches. That's what I want to talk about.

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

I wanted to quickly go to Samer and ask him about—I understand the concern about ministerial directives interfering with university autonomy, which is enshrined in the university act, but this bill also applies to the college sector, which doesn't have the same kind of legislation in place.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This bill allows the minister to impose directives on both colleges and universities in terms of the content of these policies that are required. Do you have concerns just based on the principle of giving

that kind of power to a minister to impose content of policies at our post-secondary institutions?

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: Yes, definitely. I think it is of great concern if you give this wide power to the ministers to dictate these policies on colleges and on universities. The reason is that there is no due process. There is no transparency in the decision-making. There is no feedback from experts. There is no consultation with communities on how these processes come to be.

So we need the expert feedback and the community feedback into these intricate policies in order to build responsive anti-racism and mental health policies in that sense.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. And it should be through a consultation process involving students and faculty and staff and community and experts.

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the independent member for your second round of questioning.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to start with Abigail. You mentioned how much it mattered to have a culturally responsive experience on campus. How could that apply across the campus?

1550

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Across the campus or across the province?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: It sounds like you've had a unique experience that maybe not all college and university students have. Can you share a little bit about that?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Absolutely. The reason why I so proudly share what the Black Student Success Centre has done is in the hopes that, at other institutions, we can also normalize and incentivize and encourage other institutions to meet that level of care for racialized and marginalized students on campus.

Again, the different types of services that the Black Student Success Centre offers actually extend past just that wellness and mental health support. It also includes financial supports, financial advising and postgrad advising. We've also begun to create a little bit more of a regimented pipeline between K-to-12 care while you're in university and then also helping our students to excel and propel into the real world.

It's incredibly important to realize that the systems in which we operate are inherently very colonial and, in that, they do not cater to the needs of the diverse population that we are seeing within our student body today. The Black Student Success Centre has filled such a massive gap that was necessary to help Black students, especially after the anti-racism report that came out of the athletics department after 2020 and the rise in anti-Black hatred and racism.

With that, just to wrap up, we are really enforcing the importance of culturally specific, intentional supports for marginalized communities.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

My next question is for Samer. Samer, I wonder if you could echo that a little bit. You mentioned that not all

communities were consulted, perhaps, and that you are worried that these directives might not represent the voices of such a diverse—I think Natasha, what you're saying—Jewish voice. But also, Samer, if you could speak about communities that you worry would be under-represented in the directives coming ahead.

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: In my discussion with the local communities of Kitchener-Waterloo—I am a Muslim faculty member and I'm also a Palestinian faculty member. And consulting with my two communities, the Muslim community and the Palestinian community, they are strongly opposing this bill as a solution, despite the significant increase in anti-Palestinian racism on and off campus on these things.

The question I ask is: Is the government really proposing that we've exhausted all options? There is no other solution to our mental health and anti-racism problems, other than giving up our freedoms through these directives? Is it really the case? Does the government want to convince us that there is no way to solve it otherwise? I really can't believe that.

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

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: We can solve it through the current framework, which has transparent processes and can be upgraded, and improve the process, fund it properly. We can implement all these questions. They are asking for more statistics, more reporting, so we need to work on that system. I really can't believe that the only solution is to give up our university autonomy to be able to implement these policies.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What do you think the Muslim and Palestinian communities you discussed with would like to see?

Mr. Samer Al-Kiswany: What they would like to see more is—first, the Palestinian communities would like to see an acknowledgement of the problem, because that is actually systematically lacking. Even this bill fails to mention anti-Palestinian racism, despite a significant increase in recent months. Even just an acknowledgement and putting resources into addressing it, following what Natasha said, in a culturally sensitive way is an important step forward.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move now to the final session of questioning, from the government's seven and a half minutes. Mr. Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: My question is for Ms. Abigail Samuels from the McMaster Students Union. Thank you so much for your presentation. As well, thank you to all of the other presenters that are here today that have shared their thoughts on the system and Bill 166. We really value your input. This is how democracy works and this is how we move forward as a government, taking everybody's input into consideration before bringing in bills that really affect and make change in our community.

I wanted to ask a two-part question. I just wanted to see what your thoughts were on these two particular things. I know there's been a lot of conversation about the \$1.2-billion investment our government is making, but I also

wanted to reiterate the fact that, over the last 10 years, this is the largest investment of \$1.2 billion in our efforts to support our colleges and universities. And I, too, understand. At one point, I was a student. I attended York University. So I do understand the challenges that are faced on the other side of things as well.

What are your thoughts and opinions on that particular front of the government's investment into colleges and universities?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Thank you for that question. I am aware of the announcement of the \$1.2-billion addition to the post-secondary education sector. However, I'm also aware of the province's long-standing track record of underfunding the post-secondary sector. Unfortunately, that \$1.2 billion has come at a point where we very much do need it, but has come at a point where that \$1.2 billion is not reflective on how much we actually do need.

And, again, keeping in mind that everybody is coming here, asking for money—we all need additional support. However, really, really looking at how important it is to have a sustainable funding model within our post-secondary education sector, especially looking at recent federal changes to international students really reflects the importance and the responsibility that lies on all levels of government to ensure that students are able to complete their education and within a fiscally responsible environment.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: And to that, I would just like to add the fact that it's an unprecedented amount that we've invested this year, and we want to continue to work with colleges and universities to make sure that they have the funding necessary. It's our highest goal, that we deliver the best education in the world right here in Ontario. Supporting our schools and universities is the job of our government, and our minister is committed to making sure that happens. I know she's very passionate about this and she's spent a lot of time creating solutions to how we can support and further advance great programs in schools, like mental health student programs and things like that.

The second part of my question is—I really just wanted to talk to you about transparency in the way fees are charged within the university school system. When it comes to our student fees, students pay a lot for their education. The great work that's being done on the student level to engage and support other students—and I just want to know how the McMaster Students Union is working with students and the administration to ensure that students aren't overcharged for their education and see all the fees that are collected as transparently as possible.

So, in that sense, what I'm really asking is, when students do their enrolment and they see the contributions that they're making to their own student programs, do you believe that more transparency is needed on that front, just so they can know exactly where every dollar was spent and they know what they paid for when they signed up. Do you think that's a good move on the part of the government?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Absolutely. Needing that level of transparency, especially, again, in a very difficult fiscal

environment where every dollar matters, ensuring that students are aware of what they're paying for, is incredibly important.

To that, however, I do go back to the key message, which is really needing additional support and additional funding for the educational sector. It's incredibly important. We are now publicly assisted rather than publicly funded. It has resulted in institutions relying on international student tuition, which is both unfair to our international students and as well has created a level of unpredictability within the budgeting of universities. And as we're seeing the cap come in, we are now wondering, with a lack of resources, where the \$1.2 billion—although it's a lot of money, compared to the recommendations made by the blue-ribbon panel, it is not enough. And now we fear that, again, amongst an environment where students—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: So, since you just mentioned it, I just wanted to ask: The blue-ribbon panel also stated that they wanted to remove the cap of the student fees that we have right now. Do you agree with that? Because our government is not going to do that. We're not going to raise tuition fees. But do you agree with that part of the blue-ribbon panel statement, that they want to remove that and raise fees?

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Neither the MSU nor OUSA is in favour of removing the tuition freeze. We are very much in support of that.

However, again, we really need the additional funding in order to be able to make up for deficits where raising domestic tuition will not cover those and where international student tuition—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Absolutely. We're always committed to working with all of our universities and colleges to ensure that they have the utmost funding to ensure that they're able to deliver quality education to our students.

1600

Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Just less than two minutes.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I just wanted to wrap up here and ask you about mental health being at the forefront of our conversations as well when we take a look at a lot of the issues that are surrounding our universities. I wanted to get your opinion and how you can talk a little bit about creating a standard for mental health supports at colleges and universities. Outside of the ask of money, what are things that the government can do to help support universities and colleges in terms of maybe drafting more legislation or driving guidelines from the ministry or trying to set a standard across the board throughout all universities and colleges? Maybe if you could share your opinion on that in the short minute or two.

Ms. Abigail Samuels: Absolutely. That is a brilliant question. With that, I think the government has a role to play in eliminating the barriers of the data silos. Particularly, say, for example, the individualized educational plans that are created for students that are in K to 12 don't always—

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

Ms. Abigail Samuels: —carry over once they get to university. And then in, say, for example, the barriers associated with needing to retest to get that disability diagnosis that is required to apply for funding, to apply for accommodations within post-secondary education—it creates that barrier. So that's one area where the government can help to step in.

Additionally, incentivizing and creating frameworks and guidelines for collaborating with community supports is definitely an area where I do see us going. Again, I had talked about the stepped care model, which emphasizes and capitalizes on limited resources by expanding and having a decentralized approach. With that, making use of community supports which, again, do speak to areas where there may be gaps of on-campus resources as it relates to diversity of the personnel and the services that they offer. We have to get creative with our solutions—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks so much. I want to take this opportunity to thank the two presenters online and the two presenters that are with us in the committee room this afternoon. Thank you for joining us. I want to wish you the best.

COALITION AGAINST POLITICAL
INTERFERENCE IN PUBLIC RESEARCH
AND EDUCATION IN ONTARIO
INDEPENDENT JEWISH VOICES CANADA
MR. JACOB BURMAN

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): For the 4 p.m. time slot, we have two presenters who will be joining us virtually and one that will join us here in the committee room.

The first presenter, the Coalition Against Political Interference in Public Research and Education in Ontario, we have two presenters for that. I would ask you to introduce yourselves at the start of your presentation for the purpose of Hansard. I'm not sure whether Honor or Sue is beginning, but when you do, just make sure you introduce yourself for our recording purposes. Your seven minutes begin now.

Ms. Sue Ferguson: My name is Sue Ferguson and I'm an associate professor emeritus at Wilfrid Laurier University. Anyway, I'll jump right in. Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to hear our presentation.

We want to raise serious concerns about the broader implications of this bill for democracy in Ontario which we think it's imperative the committee consider. Bill 166 fundamentally changes the way universities in this province are governed, moving us away from democratic principles of university autonomy. The bill also removes other important checks and balances characteristic of a democracy.

Bill 166 gives unprecedented powers to the Minister of Colleges and Universities to direct specific "topics" and "elements" of any post-secondary institution's mental health and anti-racism policies, and to take unspecified

action if the minister thinks the institution has not complied. Which topics and elements might be relevant to the broad categories of mental health and anti-racism is not indicated in the bill nor is it specified how the Minister of Colleges and Universities will decide upon these.

We're particularly concerned about the bill's introduction of ministerial "directives" to university governance, a practice borrowed from correctional services and public safety. Such directives conflict with and, in fact, undermine the university acts, which vest the power of university governance in university senates and boards of directors rather than in the provincial government.

The rationale for those powers is expressly to protect universities from political interference, which is a principle that's been upheld recently in Ontario and Canadian federal courts. Such autonomy is essential for preserving the independence and integrity of academic research and education, as I'm sure you understand. And it's recognized internationally as a cornerstone of democracy. So the point here is that only research and teaching that is undertaken independently of partisan political pressures can produce trustworthy knowledge. If Ontario is to attract industry and business on the strength of its robust and trustworthy education sector, we need to ensure that the safeguards from political interference in our institutions of higher learning are strengthened, not weakened.

Given the fundamental change introduced by Bill 166 and its significance for democracy, we would expect any challenge to democratic university autonomy not to be hidden in a bill about student safety, but for the government to first explicitly acknowledge and defend that measure, and secondly to invite a robust public conversation about it. The threshold for restricting democratic institutions and democratic checks and balances is understandably extremely high in our society. We would expect and desire the government to make a strong case based on extensive research, systematic public consultation and expert analysis all indicating that a reversal of what is a 100-year-old principle is the best and only option for going forward at the time being. But that isn't what we've seen.

I'll turn it over to Honor to continue.

Ms. Honor Brabazon: Thank you very much, Sue. Honor Brabazon, associate professor at St. Jerome's in the University of Waterloo.

Instead of the robust conversation and all of the consultation and research, we have seen, as evidence of the impetus for this bill, the consultations or conversations that were, I think, very productive, it sounds, but also very informal—by a tour of ministers with students and others on campuses. Ms. Pierre, for instance, said she toured the province having these conversations, and given the significance of this bill, I'm hoping that there is a report on the minister's findings that's available, that details the minister's methodology: What was the sampling procedure? Where can we find and view these data? I think that's very important.

Further, it would appear that there are alternatives that could achieve the same objectives as this bill without circumventing these democratic mechanisms. For instance,

the Anti-Racism Directorate was created to do this work, particularly at subcommittees. These subcommittees were charged with developing and leading a proactive approach to combatting racism in this province that is consistent across the province and also tailored to each community—exactly what this government says it wants to achieve with this bill. The expert-guided subcommittees envisioned in the Anti-Racism Act could be reinstated instead of passing this bill.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission is also a logical place to look for an alternative. The OHRC could be reinvigorated by this government.

Equity offices on campuses are very ready and willing to do this work, but we've heard over and over that they need funding. So that could also be an alternative.

So far, we haven't seen from this government the kind of strong case that we would expect them to make to justify a weakening of the fundamental democratic principle of institutional autonomy. I should say that one potential answer that we can glean from some of the minister's comments is that the minister believes ministerial directives would be faster. I think here the minister and the committee might want to be careful. If we look at history, the argument that democratic checks and balances, like separation of powers and arm's-length institutions, are too slow or too inefficient and need to be replaced with unchecked power tends to be made by regimes that we probably don't want to be associated with.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There is one minute remaining in your presentation.

Ms. Honor Brabazon: Again, we haven't seen this government make the kind of strong case that we would expect them to make to justify a major shift like this. We would expect to have a robust public conversation about a major change in university governance that has implications for our democracy. We would expect evidence that there is no alternative. But we haven't seen that, and it does appear that there are alternatives.

I think it's really important that the committee understands that weakening university autonomy really denigrates the integrity of our sector.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): The next presenter is also online: Independent Jewish Voices. Alejandro, when you introduce yourself, you can begin with your seven-minute presentation.

1610

Mr. Alejandro Paz: I'm Alejandro Paz; I'm a member of Independent Jewish Voices, which is a grassroots national Jewish organization with chapters in 16 cities across the country. I should also note that I'm a Jewish scholar and I'm an expert on contemporary Israeli society at the department of anthropology at the University of Toronto.

Today, I will explain why IJV is extremely concerned about Bill 166 and the clauses it contains about issuing ministerial directives to universities and colleges, and especially about the possibility of enforcing an extremely controversial definition of anti-Semitism. The bill's provisions to allow for vague ministerial directives, as my

colleagues have pointed out, as well as unspecified measures to enforce them, amount to a power grab and partisan political control, and they violate all principles of academic freedom, freedom of expression, as well as university autonomy.

First, let me introduce IJV and our position on the definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the Ontario government. At IJV, we represent an alternative voice to the decidedly conservative and right-wing position that is presented by many of the Jewish establishment organizations, especially those who act as the Israel lobby in Canada. These Israel lobby organizations often use the accusation of anti-Semitism to silence legitimate protests against the State of Israel.

Instead of this conservative position, IJV supports robust debate about the future of all people living within Israel-Palestine. We oppose the attempt of the State of Israel to impose its own settlement on the Palestinian people. Instead, we call for a just, negotiated solution recognizing that all people living within Israel-Palestine have the right to freedom, equality and to peaceful and secure lives.

To allow for a rigorous debate about Israel-Palestine's future, as well as legitimate protests of the actions taken by Israel's government, we absolutely need to protect the charter-recognized right to freedom of expression, as well as academic freedom at universities and colleges.

For this reason, we at IJV have opposed the use and implementation of the widely criticized International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, IHRA, working definition of anti-Semitism. The IHRA definition has become, in the words of its main drafter Kenneth Stern, "weaponized"—that's his term—by right-wing organizations to chill freedom of expression. In the view of IJV, it is used by right-wing lobby organizations in Canada to censor legitimate criticism and protest against the State of Israel.

It is important to note that the IHRA definition has been opposed by many experts, including experts in the history of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and the State of Israel, as well as over 210 Jewish scholars at Canadian universities and colleges. It has also been rejected by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, which represents associations numbering 72,000 educators at colleges and universities. This is why IJV is here today.

Bill 166 is being contemplated by a government that has adopted the IHRA definition, but not by going through the Legislature, rather, as an order in council. It is not clear how this order in council is being used. However, Bill 166 includes the possibility of the Minister of Colleges and Universities issuing unspecified directives to universities to combat anti-Semitism. What happens if the minister were to insist Ontario's universities and colleges implement the widely discredited IHRA definition? Such a directive would amount to a power grab, political interference of the worst sort over the affairs of Ontario's post-secondary institutions, as well as an enormous attack on academic freedom and freedom of expression. It would

contradict the government's own free speech policy from August 2018.

Could you imagine a scenario where universities could no longer invite scholars like the Israeli historian Amos Goldberg of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, one of the foremost historians of the Holocaust, because he opposes the IHRA definition, and instead endorses the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism?

The bill as currently constructed could lead to the outrageous possibility that the government would attempt to stipulate an answer to a debate among Jewish communities that has lasted more than a century—namely, what is the relationship of Jews to contemporary settlement and the State of Israel? Large surveys of Jewish Canadians have shown time and again that there is a wide range of positions among us and a robust debate about issues like what counts as anti-Semitism and what is the relation of Jewish communities to the State of Israel.

The bill could thus have absurd repercussions and, in fact, lead to anti-Semitic consequences where the government is dictating to Jewish communities how to understand our own oppression by taking the side of conservative Israel lobby organizations against others like IJV that oppose them. The bill can, therefore, not achieve its goals because it contains the possibility of doing real harm to the freedoms of students and faculty, including Jewish ones, at Ontario's colleges and universities.

Finally, in such a scenario where the minister would issue a directive to use the IHRA definition, Ontario risks contravening Canadian anti-hate legislation which requires proving intent to call someone anti-Semitic. Because they do not agree with your political position on the Israeli state or because you do not like their legitimate, non-violent protests against the actions of the Israeli government does not make their actions hateful according to Canadian law and legal norms, which are all based on intent and not on impact.

For a variety of reasons, then, IJV is very concerned about Bill 166 and urges the Standing Committee on Social Policy to withdraw this bill until it's amended to remove all language concerning ministerial directives. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Our final presenter is in person. Jacob, just introduce yourself for the purpose of Hansard. Your seven minutes begins now.

Mr. Jacob Burman: Jacob Burman. I am a Jewish fourth-year student at York University majoring in human rights and equity studies. Being Jewish is one of the most fundamental parts of my identity. Whenever I am asked what my background is, I always respond by saying, "I'm Jewish." Unfortunately, being open and expressing my Jewishness on campus has left me to be the target of countless acts of anti-Semitism where I've been left feeling targeted and vulnerable.

When I applied to York University, many people within my community told me that I should consider another school, as York has a reputation for being a hotbed for anti-Semitism. I did not fully believe it was as bad as people made it out to be until I entered my first year. I was

in my introductory course for my program, and my TA pulled me aside to tell me that I should be careful about what professors I expressed my Jewishness to, as she said she has interacted with many professors who have openly shared a dislike for Jews and followed similar beliefs to neo-Nazis. This left me petrified that a professor that I could be taking courses with felt this way about Jews.

In my third-year course “Racism in Canada,” I approached my professor to ask him if we were going to learn or discuss anti-Semitism during the course, to which he responded by saying, “There is no need to discuss it as it does not exist in Canada.” He then followed by stating, “Speaking about it becomes too political,” and continued by telling me a story about his negative experiences while visiting Israel.

I was very disturbed when I heard this from one of my professors but especially one who teaches a course called “Racism in Canada.” For the next three hours, I sat through my lecture feeling voiceless and concerned that if Jews or Israel were mentioned, I would be on my own as it was clear that my professor was purposefully ignorant of the prevalence of anti-Semitism in society.

Ever since that class, I have been left with the lingering thought that my personal value and self-worth would not be regarded as equal to my peers. I was worried that if I reported my professor’s comments to the department, it would inevitably affect my grade for that course, leaving me to feel completely unsupported by my university.

This year, following the events of October 7, the hidden forms of anti-Semitism that always existed became much more apparent at York. After October 7, I returned to campus from my reading week, and I was immediately faced with protests and rallies run by our student union. These rallies called for intifada, a term that for Jews recalls years of violent attacks and trauma, and called to expel all Zionists from York University. How was I supposed to feel safe as a Jewish student heavily involved in my Hillel, which is an openly Zionist organization?

The York Federation of Students has the mission statement to represent all students, yet they led these rallies and released a statement following the attacks of October 7 where they not only referred to Hamas as freedom fighters but went as far as to say that the attacks of October 7 were a justified form of resistance. I’ve never felt more under-represented, as it was clear that my student union represents all students except Jewish ones.

The climate at York University has become very hostile toward Jewish students. Many friends I’ve made in my program no longer speak to me or want to associate with me because I am Jewish. I have been spat at, had photos taken of me with a filter of a rat as my face with the caption, “Look at this dirty rat Jew,” and even walking through the halls of my school, I have been called many derogatory names such as terrorist, dirty Zionist, baby killer, dirty Jew, and I have been called a kike on many occasions.

I have been called all these things while walking through the halls of York, yet I refuse to let it bother me, as I have told myself on multiple occasions, “At least I

haven’t been physically attacked.” The fear of this happening has lingered in the back of my mind almost everywhere I go, especially on campus. When I walk through York every Wednesday night following my 7 p.m. class, I don’t walk with my head up while I walk. I am so concerned about the climate that I began staring at the ground to see if there was a shadow following me so I could be ready if somebody attacks me.

1620

I have never felt safe at York University as a Jewish student, and continue to feel a lack of support for students. I hope future generations of students can feel safe openly expressing themselves on campus. Thank you.

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

We will begin the round of questioning. We’ll start with the independent member. Your four and a half minutes of questions begin now.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I’d like to start with Alejandro. Just hearing what Jacob experiences on campus, how can we create interfaith dialogues and even inter-Jewish dialogues and better support students who have experienced these harassments?

Mr. Alejandro Paz: Thank you so much. I’m sorry; I can’t see who asked the question.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Aislinn Clancy, MPP for Kitchener Centre.

Mr. Alejandro Paz: Thank you so much, Aislinn. First of all, let me be very clear: No student ever should be spat at; no Jewish student should ever be called a “kike,” a “dirty rat Jew” or anything of the like. That is anti-Semitic to the core.

How can we create environments so that we can have a discussion about difficult topics like some of those which Jacob brought up? I can tell you how we can’t do it: We can’t implement IHRA. We can’t have a minister who has the power to implement and stipulate to Jewish communities what is anti-Semitism on campus, rather than allowing, as my colleagues have already stated, experts who understand this and who have studied this to produce those safe environments where, for example, Jacob and I could have a discussion about how to improve the situation on campus. The IHRA—or the way it is interpreted, especially by lobby groups—conflates anyone who takes an anti-Zionist position or is critical of the State of Israel in certain ways, with an anti-Semite. So you, by using that in a ministerial directive, have undermined the basis of your question, “How do we create those safe environments?” That is not the way to create the safe environment.

Jacob should be able to study in a safe environment and should be able to bring up difficult, controversial topics in his courses, like “Racism in Canada.” I think we need to have that possibility, but that involves the possibility of controversial things that will make someone like Jacob uncomfortable—because being uncomfortable is part of learning—to be possible as well. A ministerial directive which implements the IHRA would undermine that possibility.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

My next question is for Honor. You talked about the directives that already exist. We are adding more policy and more to-dos to underfunded universities, but you speak about things that were taken away that would have achieved these aims. Can you elaborate on what you would like to see, either if it becomes a subcommittee or the subcommittees that were cancelled?

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

Ms. Honor Brabazon: Yes, I'm happy to. Essentially there is lots of law in place and there are lots of mechanisms and institutions in place that can do the work that Bill 166 purports to try to do. The Anti-Racism Act is one of those. The Anti-Racism Directorate in particular had specific subcommittees, subcommittees that focused on anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism that were populated with experts. The vision that led to that was that these experts would guide anti-racism policy in the province of Ontario. Those subcommittees were disbanded by this government and they could be reinstated. They could be re-visioned. They could—

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

We will now move to the government's round of questions. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: I genuinely appreciate everyone bringing their voice to these tables. My questions are going to focus on Jacob Burman so he can provide his experiences at York.

So you're a fourth-year student, correct? And you're studying?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Human rights and equity studies.

Ms. Laura Smith: Human rights? All right.

So I'm going to take us back to prior to October 7. York University is a multicultural location. It's filled with all kinds of ethnicities. Did you feel hate prior to October 7? Did you feel like there was something impending upon you before?

Mr. Jacob Burman: There are always situations, not as much, like the prevalence or some amount of time that it happens following October 7, but before, there were always situations.

The thing that I told you about, my course, "Racism in Canada," that was prior to it. I've been called a kike many times before it. I've been called a dirty Jew many times before it.

Ms. Laura Smith: And that has happened through not only, you said, other students, but also in the case of the individual who taught "Racism in Canada," you felt anti-Semitism by an instructor?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Yes. I felt that it was anti-Semitic in the sense where he didn't want to teach about anti-Semitism because he was too concerned that it would become too political if Israel were to be brought up during it, which, personally, I don't feel like that is enough of a reason to not teach about anti-Semitism in a course called "Racism in Canada."

Ms. Laura Smith: Earlier today we listened to a speaker that represents a group that supports students on

campus, and he talked about how incidents of hate have increased exponentially, and they actually didn't have exact figures because sometimes those incidents of hate are not recorded.

I'm wondering if you can provide—have you reported any incidents of hate?

Mr. Jacob Burman: So, the one with my professor, I didn't do it because I didn't want my grades to be affected, but most of the time, it's while I'm walking through the halls. So if I go to report it, nothing's going to happen to the student. I don't even know this person's name, so me going out of my way to tell them—they're not really going to do anything about it. And I have friends that have reported stuff before, and nothing's ever come of it. They've sent emails to the administration and never heard back.

Ms. Laura Smith: Given the lack of, I'm going to say, follow-through with this, what do you think this bill will do—this is your final year?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: What do you think this bill will do for the future students, not only at York University but the ones across this province? And this is not specifically talking about anti-Semitism. What will that do for the future students that face all kinds of hate?

Mr. Jacob Burman: I think it will give students a lot more support. I know plenty of people from different backgrounds, different communities that have had experiences similar to this and they have the exact same story every time. They go to report it and never hear anything back. So, hopefully, the implementation of this bill will finally force the universities to follow through and actually deal with the issues or even email a student back to provide them with more supports going forward.

Ms. Laura Smith: So, obviously, from what you're talking about, people advise that the Anti-Racism Act exists, but clearly, it's not getting the puck in the net at certain locations. Have you been to other campuses and experienced any type of situations of hate, where you did not feel safe as well?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Yes, I went up to Western once to see friends, just walking down the street, people were calling us dirty Jews, kikes, and then, I recently went to Queen's for a group that I'm a part of called, "Bridging the Gap" where it's bringing Jewish students and Palestinian students together to actually have the dialogue in a constructive way, and the whole time there were many student groups who came trying to boycott it and targeted all the Jewish students the whole time to try and challenge them, and picked on them to the point that security went over and talked to them and they asked for security to be kicked out, and that was what happened. I had friends who came to watch as well, they left because they weren't feeling safe. By the end, I just got my stuff and left immediately because I didn't feel safe either.

Ms. Laura Smith: Do your friends advise what measures are available to them when they face hate at other campuses?

Mr. Jacob Burman: They don't really know where to go for anything. They could report it to their EDI office or DEDI, but they really never hear anything back, and it seems like it's a constant cycle of every single university from everyone that I've heard from. It's the exact same answer.

1630

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm going to speak as a mother now because I'm good at that. Schools should be a nurturing experience, and every student should feel safe on campus, for them to thrive. Otherwise, it's affecting their ability to function, to get good grades.

Also, there's a business aspect to this. You're paying. Families are sacrificing. You're travelling quite a long distance, I would assume—or sometimes not, depending upon whether you're going to Queen's or another location. What does that say, do you think, for the business model for these universities that are not dealing with these incidents of hate?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Well, it's kind of what I said about York before. There's a reputation within the Jewish community that it's not the best school for Jewish students, and I've been starting to hear that about a lot of other schools, too, for Jewish students. So for them, it doesn't seem like schools are going to have a higher enrolment rate if Jewish students don't want to go there because of the climates on their campuses.

Ms. Laura Smith: This has affected your social media. You talked about—and I'm not going to even repeat the terrible thing that you just said about what they did to you online. How has this affected your life, your day-to-day life?

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

Mr. Jacob Burman: It definitely affects how I walk through campus. I always wear my Star of David out, but I always have my head on a swirl as well. I choose to spend most of my time within the Jewish community as I've become so scared to branch out from it because I genuinely don't know how I'm going to be received.

Ms. Laura Smith: So what do you think college and university campuses could do, other than this bill, to support a safe student environment, not only for anti-Semitic incidents but any other student that experiences hate?

Mr. Jacob Burman: I think they have to make the resources a lot more clear and a lot more accessible to find them. At York especially, it's not that easy to find it. It's—

Ms. Laura Smith: So even mental health—

Mr. Jacob Burman: Yes, mental health—

Ms. Laura Smith: —which is part of—yes. No, you can continue, sorry.

Mr. Jacob Burman: I know people who have dropped out of university because they were struggling with their mental health, and they couldn't even go to the school to find it because they were booked for a long time or just never even got back to their emails or couldn't find the office or nobody would give them—

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

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to thank the presenters who have joined the committee today to provide your feedback on this bill.

Jacob, I just want to start by saying that what you describe that happened to you at York, at Western—I'm from London—is completely unacceptable. I thank you for coming here today to talk about what it's like to be targeted with anti-Semitic attacks, so thank you very much.

I think that what we're doing in this committee is really talking about the fact that students are suffering from mental health—very serious mental health concerns on campus. Students are experiencing anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism on our campuses. The big question that the committee is grappling with is whether this bill will fix that, whether this is the best approach to try to meet those needs.

I want to now turn to Sue and Honor. Sue, you made it very clear that you do not think that this bill is the right approach to try to address the mental health needs and supporting students who are experiencing hate and racism on campus. You talked about the principle of university autonomy. I wondered if you could expand a little bit about that principle, and then also talk about how we could address these concerns in a way that doesn't undermine those principles of university autonomy and all of the issues that you flagged about what this means for democracy.

Ms. Sue Ferguson: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much for the question. So I agree very much with your preamble too, that these are very real issues and, in fact, they need to be addressed. But the real point is that the universities need to address them through the legal mechanisms—legally imposed mechanisms, really—of what already exists in terms of having their own processes of developing policies and regulations to run their schools.

Generally, for folks who may not be familiar with the university environment, it starts at the department level. There are meetings at departments. They move up through their faculty organizations, where they discuss things with the dean. Then faculty and deans also participate in senates, and the senate is also beholden to this board of governors. So there's a very rigorous, democratic process that is already in place in the university. But, like in society at large, racism, sexism etc. continues regardless of those processes often, and that is something we do need to address.

One of the things that this whole situation has reminded me of—I'm retired from Laurier now, but when I was there in 2016, we were dealing with sexual assault and sexual harassment and coming up with a way of dealing with that issue. This is prior to the government actually—it came in in 2019, I think—to impose or to mandate that we have regulations and stuff. But what was really interesting about what happened at Laurier—and I think this would be a model for what could happen at various universities—was there was a student group called the Advocates for a Student Culture of Consent who got

together with a student/faculty group called Laurier's Gender Violence Task Force; these groups grew up on their own. They conducted peer-reviewed research together into the issue. The students learned a lot. The faculty learned a lot from that. Then, through that, they also consulted with the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region, the Sexual Assault Centre of Brant, the Collective for Feminist Action and Research and the students of the Centre for Student Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, who took part in these consultations. They drew on the Ontario Women's Directorate resource guide about responding to gendered sexual violence. And together, they pulled together a report with recommendations. They presented it. It went through that process of discussion and debate at the university level, and it was put into practice. And that's the sort of thing—you can have those sorts of policies developed, and what's wonderful about them is that they are so local. They understand the local terrain. They are all about the local culture. They do things.

One of the things that we've been doing at Laurier is, for instance, on our syllabi, we have been putting in all that resource material. All the information that perhaps was missing in the York example—but maybe wasn't; I don't know—it now has to be on every class syllabus that these are the resources, so all students know it. It's all there for them anyway. Normally, in my classes, I would talk about it; I would raise it.

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

Ms. Sue Ferguson: These are the sorts of things to try and, first of all, create policies that are based on evidence-based research to create those policies, to then review them as well with the stakeholders, if you want to use that language, who are actually going to be impacted by the policy, take it through a rigorous debate and deliberation, and then implement it.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: And if the language of the bill that refers to ministerial directives was removed and instead the bill clarified that these policies need to be developed through extensive consultation with students, faculty, community, staff, experts, do you think that that would be an appropriate way of addressing some of the issues that we've been hearing about?

1640

Ms. Sue Ferguson: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'll now ask the independent member for the second round of questioning. MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for Honor and Sue. We heard from Jacob—and I want to thank you, Jacob. It takes a lot to talk about a harmful experience that you've had. When we walk away from these events, it's really important that we recognize the way lived experiences have touched our hearts, and that's the best information we can use.

I want to refer to you, Sue and Honor, who have worked on campuses and are working on campuses. We do hear from students that don't know what to do with their

complaints of experiencing hate, or they have tried something and they haven't found accountability or they haven't had the response or the support that they needed when they were facing hate. Can you speak to either what's happening on your campus that maybe—you know, there's many campuses across Ontario—or what could be done to ensure that students like Jacob have a better outcome when they experience something like this?

Ms. Honor Brabazon: I can maybe start us off. There's a massive funding issue at post-secondary institutions right now, and we keep saying it over and over again. We have equity offices that are willing to do this work, that want to do this work. Our group has spoken with people who do this work on campuses, and they are dramatically underfunded. They want to get the word out. They want to hire experts, people who are specifically trained in culturally specific mental health supports. They want permanent employees who can do this work, and they don't have the funds. They want to be able to do all kinds of things that would help all of these situations, Jacob's included, but don't have the funds. This is really a resource issue, and there are no resources in Bill 166. I don't see how any of these problems can ever be resolved without more funds.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you. I know as a school social worker, our EDI mandate meant that, because it was a mandate without the funding, funding had to come from special education. It had to come from other services that are provided. It's an amazing service, the EDI department in my old job. They build bridges. They try to create trust by having folks with lived experience respond to the marginalized students with similar lived experience, to be an ally and invite that conversation, but these are full-time paid staff that have this expertise. That costs money.

I think I read a stat that universities and colleges already spend—is it \$1.4 billion on student services? So, yes, I guess my concern, to echo what you're saying, is that without the resources, a mandate won't deliver the kind of outcomes that you need. We need to hire those experts. We need to hire people with those professional qualifications to do this work and bring the varying perspectives so students like Jacob can have somebody who might have experienced—

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And maybe Alejandro, you've been that person for students, I hope. How have you supported students who have experienced anti-Semitism in your work?

Mr. Alejandro Paz: So, not only anti-Semitism, but also anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia. I think any approach—in fact, one of the problems, maybe, with the government's approach so far is to isolate Islamophobia and anti-Semitism instead of saying, "We need"—as Honor put it—"a holistic approach that looks at all forms of racism and tries to treat all of them together."

I'll just note that Jacob, in his presentation, mentioned that the term "intifada" means attacks on Jewish people or Israelis, and that is an incorrect way of thinking about that term. This is one of the problems. If you're only concerned

about one thing and you isolate it instead of looking at it in a broader—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the government's questioning. Thank you. MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you to all our presenters for sharing your perspectives. I did want to talk a little bit about mental health because it's a very important topic. While we are seeking to improve mental health services across the continuum of care, this is also why, for the first time in the history of Ontario, we actually have a minister at the cabinet table, the Honourable Michael Tibollo, whose sole responsibility is to work on mental health and addiction services.

So our Premier recognized the need to have a dedicated person to work on that. And that's why through the Roadmap to Wellness, our government has committed to investing \$3.9 billion—of course, supports on campus are part of that. And so this year, our government is investing \$32 million in mental health supports for post-secondary students. An interesting thing that I find: I know that students and young people are mostly engaging on their phones or online, so we're really shifting the way we deliver health care, but specifically mental health, especially to our young people.

I know that one of the things that has happened through our investment is the Good2Talk app which is a free 24/7 mental health helpline for students, or also Get A-Head, a virtual app-based mental health service.

I was just wondering, Jacob, whether you had the opportunity to use that app, or are you even aware that it exists?

Mr. Jacob Burman: If I'm being completely honest, this is the first time I've ever actually heard about it. I've never heard about it at York. I've never heard about it on TV or even in like an ad on social media.

But I think if these are accessible, they would be a great option. It just needs to be out there for people to know about it so they can get the help.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Absolutely. I think this speaks to the fact that campuses need to do a better job at advertising the products and the tools that are available to their students. Can I ask you then, were you able to seek any mental health supports, given the fact you've been going through a lot of turbulent times in your academic career? Were you able to reach out to any supports on campus?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Not necessarily supports, but Hillel has always been a place for students and where I've gone if something has happened in my classes—also just outside, with student groups that I'm a part of, my friends. I'm part of the Jewish fraternity on campus, so that's been a really safe place and has given me resources. But nothing specifically from the university.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Okay. Do you think that that's something the university could work on, to ensure that there are mental health supports readily available and advertised to all students regardless of their backgrounds?

Mr. Jacob Burman: Definitely.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much. In terms of other supports for students that colleges and universities could offer, what would those be in your opinion?

Mr. Jacob Burman: The biggest—and universities might have it or not; I think the big thing that universities really have to do is just market it so it's seen by students, especially at York University. It's really a commuter campus, most people are just going to their class and then going home. So if you're walking through the halls, you're not really ever going to see it if it's not postered up or it's not being told to students. I think schools really just have to do a better job at marketing it towards us.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much.

My next question would be to Mr. Alejandro. I was wondering based on your experience, do you think mental health supports are adequately being advertised to students on campuses?

Mr. Alejandro Paz: The University of Toronto is where I have experience, and I know that for every syllabus, you go on to our online learning system—it's called Quercus—and it's there at the top. It's all over the place. Especially during the pandemic, many more supports were rolled out. I take the point of many of you and my colleagues that much more could be done, but I can't miss the signs all through campus, on Quercus and other places, about mental health supports.

I have also, in office hours, when students have come with problems, tried to direct them to it. And that's something we've talked about as faculty members—and there's actually training sessions now: how to recognize students in crisis and to find them supports. I'll admit it's an awkward situation because faculty are not trained psychologists or crisis intervention specialist. But at least we know where to find those supports.

Though, I will say one more thing about this: Many students have stated that, at times in health and well-being on our campus—I'm talking about UTSC in particular—the line-ups are really big. Many Muslim students are looking for Muslim counsellors, especially during times like this, and there are not enough. As my colleagues have suggested, resources are really needed to expand those possibilities, especially of one-on-one counselling and other forms of support and therapy.

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Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Certainly, the topic of culturally appropriate mental health services has been raised a few times throughout the work of this committee. I'm just wondering, do you think it would be beneficial, then, in your experience as a professor, that all campuses across the province would have standardized protocols so that educators like yourself could actually know what to do when they're dealing with students in crisis?

Mr. Alejandro Paz: I believe that's in place already with the EDI and the health and wellness supports that have been rolled out, at least on our campus. As I mentioned, the first thing that pops up on my learning management system is what kinds of supports we can offer

for students. As I mentioned, there have been trainings and we've discussed this in faculty meetings, for example, of how to deal with students in crisis.

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

Mr. Alejandro Paz: I'm not sure that a one-size-fits-all across the province would be the best solution. I'm sure that populations in Toronto universities differ, for example, than other places across the province. But this is something that I would ask the experts. Perhaps my colleagues have better information.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the final round of questioning for the official opposition. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to go back to Honor. You had responded in an answer to, I think, another member—you had raised concerns about the serious underfunding of post-secondary education. I wondered if you could talk more from your perspective as a faculty member about the impact of this serious underfunding on the services that your institution is able to provide to students who need mental health supports or who are dealing with racism and hate that they have experienced on campus.

Ms. Honor Brabazon: Certainly, I can speak to other members of our group who have been addressing this and who are closer to that kind of work, who have really talked about how the disproportionately few numbers of people there are on campuses who are able to provide the kinds of counselling and support that students are asking for, like one person who does culturally specific counselling for populations of—just really ridiculous ratios who really desperately need not just temporary funding but permanent funding, something that could actually employ somebody on a long-term basis, not just a contract.

As Alejandro said, there are differences between campuses. These policies work best, in my understanding, when they actually come from the different communities that Sue was talking about, when they are organic and come up through the different governance structures. People have more buy-in; they're more relevant to the students in that particular institution. So I think that's really important, and I think that that is definitely lost when we talk about ministerial directives, especially when we think about the ways in which, at all stages of the development of these different policies and services, we're relying on experts.

That's what makes these services effective, because they come from community, and they are expert-based and expert-guided. We don't really see that—we don't see it at all with this bill. All the power is going into the hands of the minister to make these decisions, and it's not this specific minister—any minister. I think it would be a very dangerous thing to put student safety in the hands of one person who is not an expert in that area. We can imagine all kinds of awful circumstances. Maybe a minister five or 10 years down the line is himself anti-Semitic, and they now have all of the power to make these decisions about how anti-Semitism is handled on campuses. This is not something that we want. It's not something that makes

sense. This kind of power, giving it all to one person, isn't in keeping with any of the governance of universities at all.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes, and both you and Sue talked about that: the political interference with university autonomy as an undermining of the universities acts. But the legislation also applies to colleges, who have a different legislative framework. But would you say your concerns would be similar in terms of the *carte blanche* that the minister now has to determine the content and elements of the policies that colleges will also be required to put in place?

Ms. Honor Brabazon: Absolutely. I mean, we talk about university autonomy because we're at universities, but institutional autonomy more broadly is internationally accepted as a crucial principle of post-secondary education and of democracies. UNESCO recognizes this. This is a worldwide, global principle understood to be absolutely essential for democracy. You can't trust the research that comes out of an institution if you think that it might have been interfered with by partisan interests.

One of the members was talking about the business aspect of things. You can talk about whether that should be the prime concern; that's another conversation. But even just looking at it from a business perspective, no one is going to trust someone with a degree that comes from a research institution that isn't making decisions based on research, but is making decisions based on whatever whims pop into the politician who happens to be in power at that moment, right? This is about the integrity of the sector. It's going to be worthless if we don't uphold university autonomy. And it's the same with the colleges: institutional autonomy for them, as well. This is fundamental. I really can't emphasize that enough.

People outside the sector might not understand this. This kind of institutional autonomy is just a fundamental precept of the work that higher education institutions, post-secondary education institutions do.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you.

How much time, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Two minutes.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Great.

I want to ask a final question to Alejandro. When Sue was speaking earlier, she talked about the process that her institution used to develop the sexual violence and harassment policies on campus. Alejandro, you mentioned the free speech on campus policy that all institutions were required to develop. Were those policies dictated through ministerial directive in terms of the content and elements of the free speech on campus policies, or was there a discussion and a debate on campus in the development of those free speech on campus policies?

Mr. Alejandro Paz: I don't remember any discussion or arguments about it because the universities already have academic freedom and freedom of expression policies in place. So it was a bit redundant, in my recollection.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Can you just talk about—you mentioned that there could be a conflict between this legislation and the free speech on campus policy.

Mr. Alejandro Paz: Yes, because the free speech on campus policy required everyone to implement Chicago Principles, and those principles cannot allow for stipulations from a minister to decide what is under debate. What the future of Israel-Palestine looks like is under debate. We can see it all around us. You can't just stipulate certain kinds of expressions out by calling them anti-Semitic. So it directly undermines the government's own policy of implementing the Chicago Principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I want to take the opportunity to thank everyone for presenting today, both online and in person. Thank you for participating in the public hearings.

CANADIAN PUBLISHERS' COUNCIL
NETWORK OF ENGAGED
CANADIAN ACADEMICS
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
CANADIAN MUSLIMS

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I now want to move to our final three groups of presenters. We have two groups that will be presenting here with us and another one online.
1700

The first group is the Canadian Publishers' Council. As you can see on our agenda, two individuals are going to be participating in their address. Because of the direction from the committee I just want to make sure that there are no objections to both people that are present for the Canadian Publishers' Council to present. No objections? Okay.

First of all, I'll call on you in order to present. You will have seven minutes to make your presentation. When there's a minute remaining I'll prompt you that there's one minute left, and then we'll begin the rotation of the members of the committee for their questions over the next hour.

With that, I want to say to Leigh-Anne and David, whichever one of you is going to begin, I would just ask that you identify yourself, introduce yourself, for the purposes of Hansard. Your seven-minute presentation begins now. You can go ahead.

Ms. Leigh-Anne Graham: Thank you to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the opportunity to participate in today's hearings for Bill 166, the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act.

My name is Leigh-Anne Graham and I am here to speak on behalf of the Canadian Publishers' Council. With me here is my colleague David Swail, who will be available also for the question-and-answer period.

We are Canada's main English-language publishing trade association. Among our members we are proud to represent publishing companies that create and publish

courseware and books that support teaching and learning at institutions across Ontario.

Our sector is proud of our members' continuing commitment to ensuring that Ontario's post-secondary students have access to resources that support their success in their studies at their chosen institution and beyond in their chosen career paths.

We also understand that in the current economy many students and their families are rightfully conscious and concerned about the cost to attend college or university. That is why we recognize and support the Ontario government's commitment to greater accountability and transparency for students. Our sector is ready to work alongside the Ontario government and our partners in the college and university sector to do our part. This close collaboration is essential to ensure that students, regardless of the institution that they attend, are provided with consistent contextual and transparent information.

Specifically, the proposed act includes new authorities for the Minister of Colleges and Universities, enabling them to issue directives to one or more colleges and universities regarding the costs associated with attendance, which may include ancillary fees, as well as the cost of textbooks and other learning materials.

As an industry, we believe that textbooks, coursewares and other learning materials are a critical part of student success at college or university. Today these learning materials are much more than the heavy hardcover textbooks of the past. While a wide range of formats continue to be available from our partners and colleagues, today's resources are predominantly digital dynamic learning tools with built-in interactivity that deliver dynamic personalized learning experiences.

Through on-demand digital access, students can access their textbook through a variety of devices—laptops, tablets, even mobile devices—wherever and whenever they want. They can also choose a print-on-demand option if they prefer.

Moreover, students can interact in real time with their course material. Digital platforms allow them to read and review, watch or listen to enriched content and even practise workplace skills in a virtual, seamless experience. They can test and practise concepts, access real-time feedback and complete assessments and assignments, all within the courseware environment.

The shift to digital access, among other innovative challenges, has simplified the student experience by eliminating the time-consuming, exhausting scramble to buy textbooks or access course-required resources.

It's also done something else that's important for consideration, and that is to make the cost of required textbooks and course materials significantly more affordable for students. Across our sector, the cost of equivalent textbooks and learning materials is approximately 25% less than it was in 2005. This is despite total cumulative inflation of over more than 50% over the past 20 years and over 10% in just the last two years alone.

In real terms, this means that the equivalent textbook and materials for a course that previously would have cost

\$100 in 2005—equivalent to \$150 in today's currency—would cost about \$75 today. And that \$100 textbook 20 years ago had absolutely none of the on-demand interactivity, immersive content, skills development resources that students can expect today.

As we've shared, the Canadian Publishers' Council supports the Ontario government's objective to provide students with greater transparency and information about the tuition, fees and charges associated with attending college or university in the province. We also believe that faculty and administration must continue to have the flexibility to select the textbooks, learning materials and delivery methods that are best integrated with their course materials and instruction plans.

Going forward, we will work with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to express our belief that any directives issued under the proposed act provide consistent requirements to all publicly funded colleges and universities, and to ensure that, beyond information about costs alone, students are equipped with knowledge of the full range of the value that these resources can provide and how it can help them succeed.

The Canadian Publishers' Council will continue to provide our professionally informed insight and recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of the proposed measures, and to ensure that student success remains our shared objective.

Thank you, and I look forward to addressing any questions that you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to our second presenter, the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics. Deirdre and Cary, I'm not sure which one of you is going to start, but whoever does, just introduce yourself for the purpose of Hansard. Your seven minutes begin now, so one of you go ahead.

Ms. Deidre Butler: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee. Thank you for welcoming us. My name is Deidre Butler. I'm a professor of Jewish studies at Carleton University and the co-founder of the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics, NECA.

Mr. Cary Kogan: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Cary Kogan. I'm a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Ottawa and also the co-founder of NECA.

NECA is a non-partisan group of Jewish and non-Jewish academics who share their concerns about rising anti-Semitism on campuses. We advocate for strengthening academic freedom, viewpoint diversity and inclusion on Canadian campuses. We also work to protect and teach about Jewish identity as well as combat anti-Semitism. NECA represents over 220 Jewish and non-Jewish academics from 33 institutions across Canada and over 451,000 students in Ontario.

We commend the Minister of Colleges and Universities, the Honourable Jill Dunlop, for her leadership in bringing forward Bill 166 and requiring universities to have policies, procedures and accountability to combat racism and hate on Ontario campuses.

As professors with expertise on the history and contemporary expression of anti-Jewish hate, we join you today to speak directly to the second amendment to the act. As a clinical psychologist, however, I know that hate and racism are profoundly detrimental to the mental health of our students from diverse backgrounds. The second amendment is therefore inextricably linked to the first.

We equally commend Minister Dunlop for recognizing the need for better systems and policies to support students and their mental health.

We're here today to represent faculty concerns about surging anti-Jewish hatred on Canadian campuses. Long before October 7, Canadian campuses began to emerge as the front line for anti-Jewish hate. As professors, we have a unique perspective as insiders who see how anti-Semitism moves through our campuses and how our governance is failing our students.

Reports of anti-Semitism on campus fail to capture the cumulative impact of anti-Jewish hate that pervades our classrooms and campus spaces. We hear how students are afraid to report for fear of reprisals, but also that many have learned that reporting is futile.

There is a chronic lack of understanding of the history and contemporary expression of anti-Semitism that has resulted in a litany of cases where students who have sought the protection and intervention of authorities on campuses—that is, from human rights and EDI offices, security services, union representatives and other administrators—have largely been rebuffed, their complaints minimized, dismissed or ridiculed.

Ms. Deidre Butler: This is not a new problem. Over our careers, we have seen Jew hatred grow. Shortly after the Gaza War in 2014, a female student came to my office, crying that she was swarmed by a group of young men who repeatedly demanded, "You're a Jew? Are you a Jew?" nodding towards her Jewish star necklace and laughing at her fright. This student, like so many others, did report the incident, but without evidence, nothing happened. She was unsure if they filed an incident report and, to my knowledge, this case was never recorded as a hate-motivated incident.

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What happens when anti-Semitism isn't meaningfully addressed? Over the years, Jewish hate continues to escalate unchecked. We have heard shocking stories of students and faculty being spat on, being told they belong in ovens, that Hitler should have finished the job. We hear how students are forced to denounce a part of their Jewish identity—that is, their connection with Israel—to be able to participate in progressive spaces. One student union that was calling for a boycott of all Zionist companies tried to deny students kosher food. We need policies that recognize the difference between legitimate criticism of a state and promoting hatred of a minoritized group of people.

We see the result of unchecked hatred: Jewish people and their allies have been intimidated by being swarmed and filmed, threatened with physical and sexual violence,

and are regularly subjected to protests calling for the genocide of the Jewish people.

When Jews are targeted and maligned in Canada, it puts all Canadians at risk. What begins with Jews most certainly does not end with Jews. Bill 166 is needed, because existing frameworks are demonstrably failing our students. The cost of this failure is individual and collective. Students feel helpless and isolated, impacting their mental health and their ability to succeed academically. The risk we face is that the normalization of hate will carry from campus to our wider society.

Bill 166 will lay the foundation of a more civil and inclusive campus culture for all students so that all students can follow their passions and interests and fully engage in the intellectual life of the university without fear of reprisal or feeling the need to conceal essential elements of their identity. Bill 166 will renew and restore student confidence in our universities and colleges that they can be assured of a safe learning environment. Bill 166 will ensure that these priorities remain at the forefront of universities meeting their own standards and values of inclusion, open dialogue, viewpoint diversity and advancement of knowledge that are all key to building a stronger future for Ontario and all Ontarians.

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

Mr. Cary Kogan: Our non-partisan and inclusive network of faculty, the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics, is available to the government of Ontario to share research, evidence and expertise in developing best practices for addressing anti-Semitism in Ontario's universities and colleges. We extend our unequivocal support for Bill 166's calls for policies and rules to address racism and hate, including anti-Semitism.

We thank you, and we look forward to answering any questions you have for us.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Our final presenter is here with us in the committee room, representing the National Council of Canadian Muslims. Rizwan, if you wanted to just introduce yourself, your seven minutes begins now.

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Good afternoon, Chair and members of this committee. My name is Rizwan Mohammad, and I am an advocacy officer with the National Council of Canadian Muslims, or NCCM. I've spent the last 10 years or so leading civic engagement projects with post-secondary students, Muslim and non-Muslim, from coast to coast. I'm here today to talk about the impacts of hate on Muslim students in Ontario's colleges and universities and how the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, or Bill 166, can help mitigate that.

A little bit of background: Over the past few months, the killing and injuring of Israeli and Palestinian civilians, including thousands of children, have sent shockwaves of pain, fear and anger through the lives of thousands of Ontarians, including students, faculty and administrators at Ontario's colleges and universities.

Since October 2023, the NCCM education team has been responding to a 900% increase in cases of Islamo-

phobia and anti-Palestinian racism from students. We are deeply concerned about experiences of harassment, gendered Islamophobia and violence on campuses across Ontario.

In our view, post-secondary institutions are meant to be spaces of critical debate, reflection and exploration. They are not meant to be spaces that allow hate to fester. Students can't thrive in learning environments where their identity is targeted and up for constant debate.

Post-secondary students who are visibly Muslim are reporting repetitive incidents on campuses, including physical assaults, threats of violence and verbal abuse as part of a pattern that we're seeing of intimidation and harassment, sometimes amounting to discrimination.

Administrators at institutions of higher education across the province have been responding to these incidents of Islamophobia in different ways. Unfortunately, many of them are perpetuating systemic Islamophobia through extreme, unbalanced or inappropriate reactions. Due in large part to such reactions, many incidents are apparently going unreported by Muslim and Palestinian students, or are reported but do not receive timely or appropriate responses from administrators.

I'll say a quick word about what we mean by anti-Palestinian racism and what we're talking about when we're talking about Islamophobia, and give some examples. We understand anti-Palestinian racism as the dehumanization and denial of the equal dignity of Palestinian people. Some of the examples of this kind of discrimination that we're seeing on campuses include exclusion or censorship of Palestinian perspectives from academic syllabi and academic debates. We're also seeing stereotyping or defaming of Palestinians and those who defend Palestinian human rights as un-Canadian or supportive of violence or terrorism.

Also, when we're talking about Islamophobia, we're talking about it in terms that the OHRC talks about it. The Ontario Human Rights Commission says that Islamophobia includes "racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general."

Some examples of Islamophobia that we're seeing on campuses right now include the silencing and censure of conversations exploring concerns around human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, with a special attention and concern around Gaza and the humanitarian crisis there. We've received cases of staff, faculty and students reporting this. For example, you can look at the case of the University of Ottawa doctor who was suspended for pro-Palestinian posts and after the suspension was widely criticized. He was reinstated but declined to return to his post. The university lost a significant and valuable faculty member.

We are also seeing examples of Islamophobia in attempts to curtail freedom of expression and peaceful organizing on campus. Many students have reported concerns about being surveilled or disciplined for their organizing to address human rights violations in Palestine. For example, a recent media report showed screenshots

where members of a private Facebook group discussed plans to pressure medical residency program administrators—I'm referring to the Canadian Resident Matching Service, or CaRMS—to penalize students who had signed a petition calling for an end to Israel's bombing of hospitals in Gaza. This CaRMS process forced the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada—the AFMC—to make a statement clarifying their strategies for an equitable and unbiased resident match for all applicants.

Keeping all of these concerns in mind, we think that immediate steps taken in Ontario to mitigate the pervasive harassment of Muslim students and faculty are welcome. The intent of legislation to mandate that all post-secondary institutions have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, is a positive and welcome step by the provincial government.

In a related way, the intent to require that post-secondary institutions have mental health policies is also a welcome step to address the adverse impacts of hate on mental health. We are supportive of enshrining a requirement for all post-secondary institutions to have anti-hate policies. We also support principles in the legislation meant to promote more accountability to students impacted by hate on campuses. However, that said, we must be cautious to ensure that the passage of this bill will not have unforeseen consequences on free speech on campuses that is not harmful or hateful.

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

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: To further strengthen Bill 166, we therefore recommend a few clarifications:

(1) We recommend including explicit mention of anti-Palestinian racism along with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Anti-Palestinian racism is one of the most pervasive forms of racism on campuses. It has been for more than the last decade, and currently it shows no signs of abating. Most post-secondary officials do not mention it in their anti-hate policies and they have a very poor record of acknowledging it and responding to it. Legislation that names it would be helpful.

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(2) In section 20 on policies and rules regarding racism and hate, we recommend adding an additional clause to further clarify that the minister's directive will only be used to promote more transparency and accountability and that it will not infringe on free speech.

(3) We'd recommend, in section 20, also adding a subclause that states, "Notwithstanding the above, section 20 will be read in a way that is both consistent with the charter and the principles of academic freedom."

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

The first round of questions will be the government's seven and a half minutes. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker, thank you to everyone attending here today, albeit virtual or here in person. We truly appreciate your input.

I'm going to be asking a series of questions. I think I'm going to start with Deidre Butler, who is the associate professor with the network.

Deidre, I think we can all agree, everyone in this room, that campuses should be a place of learning, an inclusive situation where our students can thrive, with positive energy and a place where they do not feel like who they are as an individual can be attacked, either physically or emotionally.

I listened to your statement, Deidre. Do you believe that freedom of speech has gone over the boundaries of hate on the campuses of colleges and universities across Ontario?

Ms. Deidre Butler: A very difficult and complex question for universities that are always balancing free speech with academic freedom. Our purpose today is to talk about the experience of Jews and their allies on campus who are facing anti-Semitism.

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes. So, we've also heard from previous speakers that believe that they're not heard, and what you brought to the table today resonated with this because they felt that they could not actually provide their viewpoint or record the incidents of hate because it was not followed through. In some situations, they felt this pressure from not only other students but also faculty, and I'm wondering if you could talk about that.

Ms. Deidre Butler: I've been a Jewish studies professor since 2006, so a number of years, and for years, I have heard students come to my office with concerns about what's happening in classrooms and in public spaces. Certainly, it has become more difficult over the last several months, but these problems actually predate October 7—

Ms. Laura Smith: I was about to ask you about that, yes.

Ms. Deidre Butler: They absolutely do. And what I would say to this question is that we believe, as a network, that with academic freedom comes academic responsibility. We have statements about academic freedom that talk about the legal concept of students as a captive audience and that, as a captive audience in our classrooms, we actually have heightened responsibilities to our students to allow for plurality of voices and perspectives. And so, this is what we would encourage through our own efforts.

Ms. Laura Smith: So you're saying perspectives through faculty, perhaps, that the views might influence or allow that student to not feel free in discussing who they are—and you talked about student unions, as well, or other unions within organizations. Do you think those organizations should have the right to provide, let's say, direction or education that goes outside the scope? If a student walks into a computer studies class and that class is not happening and they're talking about something else—which is something that I've heard of—do you think that the university or the college has the right to do that?

Ms. Deidre Butler: What I would say about this—and I encourage my colleague Cary Kogan to also speak here—is that there are many definitions of academic freedom that are more broad or more narrow. I personally would subscribe to a version or an iteration of academic

freedom that clearly ties our academic freedom to our areas of expertise.

Ms. Laura Smith: So if a student is walking into a computer studies program, they should be limited to computer studies.

Ms. Deidre Butler: Absolutely. And if the professor has a syllabus, you should be able to look at that syllabus, see that there's none of this on that syllabus, and the student can feel reassured to be there.

I would add that I know that students are not joining programs, are avoiding certain courses and professors, because they've heard what they will face. They're intentionally choosing classes where they won't have to deal with contentious issues. They want to focus on their computer science or their history of English literature.

Ms. Laura Smith: All right. I'm going to be asking Mr. Kogan a couple of questions. You talked about research in the area of anti-Semitism, and we've talked a lot about statistics.

In your opinion, the amount of students—and I'm sorry; I'm just going to group this. There's hate across the board, but let's talk about anti-Semitism. It's 2% or 3% of the Ontario population, maybe less when you consider the entire province. But what would you say is the rate of anti-Semitism that exists on campuses across this province?

Mr. Cary Kogan: This is an excellent question. I would say that we have a problem in Ontario, that we actually don't know how many Jewish students are on our campuses, and we have a problem that we don't actually know the number of incidents that are happening on campus. It's partly because of the way the reporting systems are functioning or not functioning where students are experiencing the kinds of things that we described in our remarks and some of the experiences that we were just talking about where they don't feel that they can actually fully participate in student life because part of their identity is being forced to be concealed because they can't—

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

Mr. Cary Kogan: So I will say that if we look at the overall national statistics, there has been a remarkable rise in anti-Semitic hate. We know from hate crimes data from, for example, Toronto, from hate crimes data from Statistics Canada that there has been an overwhelming increase in hate crimes. So we can assume and logically connect it to that the same things happening on campus.

But what we're hearing from students is that they are experiencing a climate that is unprecedented of hostility.

Ms. Laura Smith: It's my understanding, given what you've just said, that there's a lack of accountability within the college and university campuses that allow these hateful incidences to be reported, regardless of whether it's hate against one group or another.

So just in closing, how do you think this bill is going to—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'm sorry. Our time has run out.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to all the presenters who have joined us today both virtually and in person. I wanted to start with Rizwan from the NCCM—and thank you for your presentation.

While you support the intention of the bill and certainly you pointed out the intersection between students who experience racism and hate on campus and then the impact on their mental health, you also raised a flag about potential impact on freedom of speech on campus. I wondered if you could elaborate a little bit more about that concern and how you think that could be mitigated in this bill.

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Thank you for that question. I think there has been a long-standing question in Canada about whether the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and free speech protections apply on campuses and how that actually works. If you look at legislation that—as of 2020 and the Alberta Court of Appeal ruling, they determined that the charter does apply in terms of how universities and colleges conduct their business, but no such ruling that we're aware of has happened in Ontario or BC and so forth—I think Saskatchewan, as well.

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Enshrining that in a subclause or in the language of the bill, enshrining the commitment to charter protections, the principle of academic freedom explicitly, would help address this, mitigate this and help guide the anti-hate policies that we want to see. There's a very broad array of different kinds of anti-hate policies that colleges and universities currently have, and creating standards for that and creating expectations for that, and hopefully enshrining the principle of academic freedom within the bill could also help mitigate the risk of the anti-hate policies being heavy-handed or being applied or interpreted in a way that ended up abusing free speech and academic freedom. That's essential for our campuses to protect.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. Thank you for that response.

Another one of your recommendations was that ministerial directives should only be used to increase transparency. One of the, I think, troubling aspects of this bill that a lot of presenters have raised concerns about is the fact that it empowers the minister to determine the content and the elements of these policies on student mental health and on racism and hate through a ministerial directive. There's no reference in the bill to any requirement for broad consultation on campus with students, faculty, community members, experts etc.

Because of your recommendation that the bill specify that directives should only be used to increase transparency, are you also concerned about giving this power to the minister to dictate the contents of these policies unilaterally?

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: This is an important question. We know a lot of students and faculty, administrators and other speakers who have addressed this committee have raised concerns about this. I think it's a best practice whenever we are looking at a ministerial directive in legislation like this to make sure that there are some guardrails, so that the intent of what that ministerial direc-

tive is meant to accomplish can be clear and transparent for everyone and can avoid future government ministers who may have other political perspectives that may veer into being heavy-handed about these kinds of things—to mitigate the risk of that, so guardrails to ensure that the ministerial directive is used for ensuring that there is transparency from the universities.

We heard from previous presenters that the number of incidents of hate that occur at colleges and universities is still very cloudy for a lot of people. A lot of us do case intake; we hear reports for the NCCM. We've heard hundreds of stories from across the province at major colleges and universities, but that can't be the standard by which action is taken. We really need to see universities and colleges reporting these kinds of figures and helping us all to work from a common set of facts. And so, transparency from the minister's directive, working to promote that, would be something that we would be supportive of, and accountability. By accountability, we're thinking about the accountability that university administrations have towards students. We've seen many times students report or try to report incidents and not receive a response in a timely way, or receive a response that seems to diminish or devalue the concerns that they were raising, the seriousness of them.

From that perspective, we think it would be helpful to clarify that language in that section, in section 20 of the bill.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to go to your recommendation on adding anti-Palestinian racism. Can you just elaborate a little bit more about why that's so important from your perspective?

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: This needs so much more discussion. We hope that elected officials can be meeting with students who are in their constituencies to have that conversation. Unfortunately, what we hear from students and community members is that there's not enough engagement and discussion about the current anti-Palestinian racism that we're seeing on campuses. We're also seeing it in our streets and in our workplaces.

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

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: So I think legislation that starts to try to name this is really important because current anti-hate policies don't name it and the Ontario Human Rights Commission doesn't name it. So to have it named somewhere would be very helpful.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Is it named in other provinces that you're aware of, at this point?

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Not at the moment.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. You talked about a 900% increase in Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism that you're hearing about. And you're seeing this on campuses as well as in communities, or was that figure just for campuses?

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: That's specifically for campuses. It's as high as 1,600% overall since October 2023 until today.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My goodness. Okay, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to the government's final round of questioning. MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you to all of our presenters for sharing your very important perspectives today.

My questions will be directed towards the National Council of Canadian Muslims. I'm very proud to represent Mississauga Centre, which has a vibrant and growing community of Muslim Canadians—24,000 and growing rapidly. It's home to three different masjids, the Al-Farooq mosque, the Muslim Welfare Centre, as well as the Shalimar Islamic Centre.

Over the last six years I spent quite some time learning about Islam, the five pillars and the community. I've attended many iftars. I've fasted one day, on occasion, for Ramadan. The Muslim community are my friends and my neighbours, and I'm just really proud to represent this very cultural riding.

Of course, since the geopolitical conflict started recently, a lot of my neighbours and friends from Muslim communities have expressed to me that they have been suffering. You said it yourself, that this is impacting Ontario families. So I just wanted to hear from you, from your perspective, given the statistic that it's a 900% rise in cases of Islamophobia, specifically on campus, what are the impacts of that on students' mental health?

As a follow-up, I also wanted you to define the term "gendered Islamophobia." I'm not quite sure what that means. If you could define that for us, that would be very, very helpful.

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Thank you, MPP Kusendova, and thank you for your long-standing engagement with constituents about all of the issues that matter to them, including this one.

About gendered Islamophobia—maybe I can start there. Simply, what we're talking about is where people who identify as Muslim or who may be perceived as Muslim who are women are targeted for hate and discrimination, Islamophobia for their Muslimness and sexism that takes on particular characteristics because of their Muslimness. For example, just to simplify things, a common example of gendered Islamophobia is when a Muslim woman that wears a head scarf is threatened with sexual violence and told, "All the human rights work that you're doing here, you're protesting or whatever—go to Gaza and try to say some of this stuff and see how those men treat you. Now we give you equality here." So that kind of inflammatory and sexist and racist or hateful language is what we're referring to.

If members of this committee want to look at the Canadian Council of Muslim Women or other organizations that are experts in this area, there's lots of resources that they have to explain how this works and how to counter it.

Specifically about the mental health impacts, I would say we're hearing from student associations and we're hearing from student unions that there's an "epidemic" of mental health issues on campuses. It's not just related to

the geopolitical conflict overseas, it's related to a lot of different things. But, certainly, I think, since October 2023, we're seeing Muslim students say very clearly that any time they're trying to raise concerns or talk about these things on campuses, they're getting harassed, they're getting disciplined, they're being threatened with discipline. So that's definitely adding to chronic stress.

People are telling us that anxiety is going up, depression is going up. We're seeing that there's some investments coming to provide mental health supports in the form of faith-based chaplaincies—because a lot of campus administrations are telling us that a lot of Muslim-identifying students don't end up actually coming into the usual mental health supports that are there, often because, the students tell us, a lot of the supports that are offered are often not taking into account the cultural sensitivity or the faith-based sensitivities that are needed to actually provide some effective supports. So that's where faith-based chaplains on campuses are trying to provide supports, but they're severely underfunded. They're very precarious.

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We actually had, recently, in Toronto, a chaplain told me that he was unwelcome on campus because of some social media posts that were controversial. The administration, when they tried to seek a meeting to discuss what was the issue and how could they find a solution—the Muslim Chaplaincy of Toronto requested a meeting with the University of Toronto Scarborough campus and they, to date, as far as I'm aware, have not agreed to a meeting to discuss exactly what happened.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: One of the aims of this bill is to actually create a standard across college campuses and university campuses, precisely to deal with these types of issues, to provide a standardized way that the administration can respond to these types of events. Do you think that having this type of standardization would be beneficial to students of all ethnic backgrounds and religious backgrounds?

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Thank you for that question. That's really important because we want to get to a kind of standards and common facts, but we also don't want to impose or interfere with the independence and the autonomy of universities to develop anti-hate policies and rules that address the specific needs of their campuses. And so we would welcome an approach that tries to find a good balance between creating some reporting standards, for example, to say, "Yes, let's track the number of hate incidents. Let's try to have some standards around how we respond," but not to impose too much on the process, so that we can make sure that there's flexibility and that people are responding in a context-appropriate way.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you.

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Thank you.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to all of this afternoon's presenters.

My question is for Leigh-Anne, actually, from Canadian Publishers' Council.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you for your comments. Our government has worked really hard to remove barriers and make post-secondary education more accessible to students who want to attend college and university across the province of Ontario. I know you support transparency and disclosure about funding of textbooks. Is there anything else that you would like to tell the committee today? Yours isn't a topic we get to hear a lot about and I'm just wondering if you wanted to take the last 30 seconds and if there's anything else you want to share with the committee today.

Ms. Leigh-Anne Graham: Sure. Thank you for the question. I think the discourse about textbooks and course materials usually is about cost. Our main point of being here and supporting the transparency piece is that the benefits—so many students, in an attempt to avoid costs, don't understand the full value of what—

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

We've got the final list of questions. MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I do want to go back to the NCCM. Leading on what you were speaking about in your response to the last question and the value of faith-based supports for students, in particular Muslim students who don't go through the regular access to mental health supports—and we have heard repeatedly, actually, over the two days of hearings, people talk about the importance of culturally responsive, culturally informed responses to students who are struggling with their mental health. We also heard about the need for training for staff, faculty—more widespread on campuses. Certainly, those things require funding.

You talked about the underfunding of the imams that you have on campus, the chaplains, and I wondered if you could just expand a little bit more on the importance of providing the resources to make these options available to students on Ontario campuses.

Mr. Rizwan Mohammad: Thank you for that question. On campuses across the country and across Ontario, I have met with Christian chaplains of various denominations, Jewish chaplains, Muslim chaplains, Sikh chaplains, Hindu chaplains and people who are even providing faith-based supports or spiritual supports from Indigenous perspectives, Wiccan perspectives and other things. Some universities and colleges have a broad array of these kinds of approaches and supports, and others have none or are very homogeneous.

I think one of the things that we're seeing in terms of supports is that where, for example, a Muslim chaplain has started to provide services—and they may be fundraised in the community. I've been to fundraisers where students were giving \$10 or \$20, trying to give whatever they could to fund a professional person, a chaplain. And to be clear, we're not talking about an imam, in general, that you'd find in a mosque; we're talking about trained psychotherapists who also have a faith identity and a faith understanding and a track record of serving the Muslim community or a faith-based community. Those people may

start doing those services based on the initial funds raised, but if their services get interrupted, which often has happened, it's one step forward, two steps back—there are so many students who are left in more difficulty than when they started, because of the interruption of those services.

There needs to be a long-term, strategic investment in this area, in mental health supports broadly, and to also have wide consultation with various faith-based communities to make sure that—students, a lot of times, are coming—even if they live in, let's say, Ontario and they're going to a different university in Ontario, they may be living away from their family for the first time. So mental health supports, right now, are critical to invest in.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much.

I want to go to the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics and ask a similar question about your perspective on the importance of having culturally responsive mental health supports, access to faith-based services for students and also some training on our university and college campuses to respond to the kinds of issues that students are experiencing.

Ms. Deidre Butler: Perhaps I could speak quickly and then move to Cary, who is a clinical psychologist.

What I want to say is that I'm also seeing an epidemic of mental health challenges and needs among our students. We had to open a safe space at my university for Jewish students, and a key part of that safe space was that we had a weekly mental health session that we arranged with the community. Jewish students, as well, have reported that they don't feel comfortable going to health and counselling services because of a lack of cultural sensitivity around these issues. Our students are in crisis. They've been in crisis since COVID, and anti-Semitism makes it worse.

I'm going to pass it to Cary.

Ms. Cary Kogan: Thank you for the question.

My work as a researcher at the University of Ottawa is on examining the relationship between anti-Black racism and mental health issues. I can tell you from our data—and we have extensive data from a Canadian sample, the largest data set that has been gathered—interestingly, those who experienced the most racism also experienced the highest levels of anxiety and depression, and we're talking about ninefold, compared to those who have had the lowest level of exposure to racism. A lot of the students are reporting that racism is happening in our institutions,

that includes universities and colleges. So it's a serious concern.

And there is a concern about training of professionals. My program at the University of Ottawa—I'm not here representing my university, but our program has actually made an effort to ensure that we have a diverse group of students from many backgrounds. We've actually reserved spots to allow students who can come into our program and be trained as clinical psychologists to provide the services that are culturally sensitive to communities. So it's training at all levels—it's training of our psychotherapists; it's training of our front-line workers at universities; it's the training of administrators; it's the training of EDI offices—about what anti-Semitism is, what Jewish identity is, and their experiences, and how not being aware of that ends up excluding people and contributes to their mental health deterioration. So it's really important that this piece gets picked up.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: We've also heard quite frequently throughout these hearings concerns about underfunding of post-secondary education. You're at two different institutions. What is the impact on mental health services for students when we have almost half of our Ontario universities looking at deficits this year?

Ms. Deidre Butler: We can both speak about our students who are struggling to secure appointments for mental health help and they're not getting it. Often, in the rhythm of a semester or when something is happening—that's when all of the students are looking for help, and the system is simply overwhelmed, so it's something that we all need to invest in for this generation.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you to our presenters who have joined us online. I want to thank the three presenters joining us here in committee room 2. I want to thank the members.

That concludes not only our business for today but the public hearings for Bill 166. Again, thank you to everyone who has made their presentation.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is tonight, Tuesday, April 16, at 7 p.m.

The committee now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, April 23, when we'll begin clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 166.

The committee adjourned at 1752.

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