May 27, 2024

Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North
Minister of Colleges and Universities

RE: Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Students Supports Act

Dear Minister Dunlop,

As the Executive Committee of the University of Toronto Students’ Union (UTSU), representing over 40,000 full-time undergraduate students at the University of Toronto, we are writing today to express our concerns with the recently passed Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Students Supports Act.

We agree with the intent of this bill, and are pleased to know that the Ontario government is committed to a post-secondary system that is healthy, sustainable, and inclusive. As student union executives, and students ourselves, we find it essential to support the expansion of mental health support, anti-racism initiatives, and transparency within our post-secondary institutions.

However, we do not believe that Bill 166 reflects input from students who will be directly impacted by it. We also are concerned that Bill 166 may equip the provincial government with an unjustified level of control over post-secondary institutions, resulting in the undermining of academic autonomy.

This is especially worrying as these measures are being taken in the name of mental-health and anti-racism initiatives, without pledging funding that is crucial to the advancement of this work. We worry that this bill may harm rather than benefit students, such as by limiting the right to protest and freedom of expression.

We would like to note that the majority of post-secondary institutions already have policies outlining our work on mental-health and anti-racism, including the University of Toronto. As there are already experts and frontline workers leading this work, universities require funding, resources, and support to continue this work. There is no space for government intervention or authority to determine practices and policies that already exist and are implemented.

We are also concerned that Bill 166 does not reflect input from communities and stakeholders who will be directly affected, especially students. We urge you to consult with groups who will be impacted by this bill, including students, professors, and members of university communities. We would like to stress the need to consult students from equity-deserving groups, as it is these students who are often most drastically affected by such legislation, while being the least supported.
As student union executives, we are interested in discussing this bill with you further to provide our perspectives on what directives should be put into place, in order to best support our students.

We hope that this is the first of many steps forward to advancing mental-health supports and anti-racism initiatives, and we welcome any opportunities to contribute to further dialogue about these important issues.

Thank you,

The UTSU Executive Team