



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des associations des professeurs des universités de l'Ontario

OCUFA calls for resignation of Ross Romano amid devastating cuts to jobs and programs at Laurentian University

TORONTO, April 12, 2021 — Following news that approximately 60 programs have been cut at Laurentian University and that over 80 faculty members have lost their jobs, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations is calling for the resignation of Minister of Colleges and Universities Ross Romano. These devastating cuts are the direct result of negligence on the part of the Minister, who was well aware of the financial challenges Laurentian was facing at least six months before they became public. Romano has not done the work needed to support Laurentian University and its students, faculty, or community. Ontario's university faculty and academic librarians have lost confidence and trust in the Minister's commitment to the university sector.

"If Ross Romano had done his job, none of these cuts would have occurred," said Rahul Sapra, President of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. "Romano and the Ford government knew about the depths of Laurentian's financial difficulties for months, if not years. They had numerous opportunities to take action to avert this crisis. Instead, they chose to do nothing and betrayed the trust of Ontarians."

The financial crisis facing Laurentian was created by the provincial government, which has chronically underfunded Ontario's universities, cut and froze tuition fees without providing equivalent public funding, and abandoned an important Northern university in its greatest moment of need.

As Minister, Romano has demonstrated the same resistance to consultation, transparency, and accountability as the Laurentian administration. Romano has made announcement after announcement for the postsecondary education sector without consulting faculty, academic librarians, staff, or students. He has also repeatedly refused invitations to meet with representatives of OCUFA to discuss the situation at Laurentian and other challenges facing Ontario universities.

A recent poll conducted by EKOS Research Associates for OCUFA shows that Ontarians strongly disagree with Romano's negligent approach. According to 66 per cent of Ontarians, the provincial government should provide Laurentian with the funding it needs to protect its bilingual and Indigenous programs. A further 63 per cent of Ontarians want the government to provide additional funding to protect programs and jobs at other universities that face financial difficulties.

The Ontario government needs to immediately invest in Laurentian University to avoid job losses, reverse these harmful cuts, support students and the Greater Sudbury community, and reassure public universities across Ontario that the government is committed to their success.

"This news is devastating for the faculty and staff who have dedicated their lives to Laurentian University," said Sapra. "The impacts of these cuts will be felt well beyond the halls of Laurentian. They will reverberate throughout the Greater Sudbury area, hurting students, hard-working families, and the local economy."

Although the full scope of the cuts is not yet clear, OCUFA expresses its unreserved support for members of the Laurentian University Faculty Association, staff, and students at the university.

The cuts announced at Laurentian follow months of costly and secretive legal proceedings under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) that have been forced on faculty and staff by the Laurentian University administration with implicit approval from Minister Romano. From the start, OCUFA has argued that the CCAA is being inappropriately used, as it is legislation created for private-sector corporations, not public universities.

Laurentian University is a public institution, which means that Romano and the provincial government have a responsibility to provide it with the operating funding it needs to operate effectively. Instead, Laurentian is the first public university nationwide to experience a financial crisis and receive no financial assistance from the provincial government.

“If Minister Romano believes in Ontario’s public university system, he needs to step in now and fund Laurentian,” said Sapra. “If not, he should resign from his position as Minister to make way for someone who understands the importance of Ontario’s world-class public university system, is willing to secure its future for current and future generations, and will provide immediate funding to save Laurentian University.”

Founded in 1964, OCUFA represents 17,000 professors and academic librarians in 30 faculty associations across Ontario. It is committed to enhancing the quality of higher education in Ontario and recognizing the outstanding contributions of its members towards creating a world-class university system. For more information, please visit the OCUFA website at www.ocufa.on.ca.

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