



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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Mr. Shafiq Quaadri, MPP
Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, and
Mr. Trevor Day
Clerk for the Standing Committee on Social Policy
Whitney Block, Room 1405
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

Dear Mr. Quaadri and Mr. Day,

Re: OPSBA Submission - Bill 160, *Occupational Health and Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011*

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary school students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy regarding *Bill 160, Occupational Health and Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011*.

We recognize that this proposed Bill and its amendments are intended to respond to the recommendations provided by the Expert Panel on Occupational Health and Safety led by Tony Dean. Furthermore, it is our understanding that this proposed legislation is initially addressing only some of these recommendations and that the rest are to be phased in over time to allow for future consultation.

Our Association fully supports ensuring that schools are safe places for students to learn and staff to work. School boards are committed to providing a safe learning and working environment for everyone.

It's important to note that school boards have policies and procedures in place already that address occupational health and safety concerns. Most school boards have Health & Safety Managers and they connect regularly with their counterparts across the province. In addition, Boards provide training to their employees.

With respect to Bill 160, we note that the proposed legislation focuses on the creation of a Chief Prevention Officer and Prevention Council. It also gives powers to the Minister of Labour to promote public awareness and educate employers, workers and other persons about occupational health and safety. We are supportive of these amendments and agree that by giving the Minister of Labour the responsibility for prevention, all related activities will be better aligned.

The proposed legislation indicates that the Minister of Labour would create new "standards for training." It does not, however, address responsibility for the cost for workers (and employers) to participate in these new standardized training programs. It is our position that fully funded, regular and on-going training that does not

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impact services provided to students is critical to ensure that all of our workers, be they teachers, support staff, principals, or others, remain aware of health and safety issues.

School boards spend significant amounts of money on training for staff to improve student educational outcomes. The costs of training for the many thousands of school board employees would be significant, and if required, must be borne by the provincial government through the allocation of a specific grant targeted to training, including the costs of training facilities and trainers.

With regards to possible future amendments, there were two recommendations in the Expert Panel Report that directly referenced the education sector. These were:

- *The Ministry of Education should work with school boards, private schools and teacher organizations to expand the health and safety content of primary and secondary school curricula and update teacher resource material to allow them to effectively teach these curricula.*
- *The Ministry of Education should make high school graduation dependent upon demonstration of knowledge of occupational health and safety.*

OPSBA believes that education is key to creating safe workplaces and preventing accidents. Due to the compressed nature and demands of the current curriculum, we recommend that the Ministry of Education consider the approach of more deeply infusing occupational health and safety knowledge within the current mandatory credit course, Guidance and Career Education, rather than creating an additional mandatory credit or half-credit course. Furthermore, we do not support creating additional barriers for students to graduate.

Finally, our members have also indicated that it would make sense to connect with Safe Communities Canada – Passport to Safety and the ongoing work of Paul Kells, whose son Sean died tragically while working, without the preparation of safety training, at a new job in 1994. Their mission is “to help people come together in the community to create a sense of awareness, understanding, support and leadership to implement local programmes to eliminate injuries and suffering.”

We would ask that the Ministry of Labour consider the points outlined in this submission. We extend an offer to work collaboratively with the government as a stakeholder in any education-related discussions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments on Bill 160.

Sincerely,



Catherine Fife, President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

Copy: Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Education
Kevin Costante, Deputy Minister