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Autism Ontario Statement: Autistic Students Left Behind Again

Autism Ontario calls for the immediate resumption of negotiations with CUPE education workers. We recognize that engaged education workers are essential to support autistic students and students who learn differently. Autism Ontario believes that to be engaged, education workers require fair and equitable negotiation, working conditions, and compensation.

Research has shown that students with disabilities have been disproportionately negatively affected by school closures throughout the pandemic. While some students have been able to pivot to online learning, this has not been possible for many students who learn differently. In a province-wide study of Ontario parents of autistic children by the Laurier Autism Research Consortium, the [Families in Flux](#) report noted, “Over half of caregivers indicated that their child was not engaged in online learning during the province-wide shutdowns (Q5.20)....” Without in-person learning, many of these students are being denied their right to education as protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Autism Ontario is alarmed by the use of the notwithstanding clause to pass the Keeping Students in Class Act, which deprives education workers of the right to strike. Throughout consultations for the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee, the Ministry of Education endorsed a human rights approach and elicited province-wide feedback. Autism Ontario calls for the Ministry to respect the rights of workers by returning to the negotiation table.

“As a parent, it is frankly disappointing to see autistic children like my own once again being left behind. Proposing a shift to virtual learning without providing accommodations to kids that cannot access virtual learning resources due to their disability means they cannot access any form of education, which is a blatant disregard of the Ontario Human Rights Code,” says Leo Lagnado, parent of a five-year-old autistic daughter and member of the Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee.

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For more information, email Autism Ontario’s media team at media@autismontario.com.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a history of over 49 years of representing thousands of families and people on the autism spectrum across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has elected volunteer parent representation in all areas of the province through our seven Regions. We advocate with and on behalf of all people on the autism spectrum and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit <http://www.autismontario.com>.