



## CAMPAIGN BRIEF



The Conservative Government's overhaul of Ontario's student financial aid system is no longer a theoretical threat. On March 23rd the ONDP introduced a unanimous consent motion in the Ontario Legislature to reverse Ford's cuts to OSAP, and the Government voted it down. Students and families are already having to change their plans for their education because of the proposed funding models. This comes on top of years of cost-of-living pressures and growing student debt burdens. In light of this, our campaign is shifting from warning to accountability: raising awareness of how OSAP changes are affecting students, who is being hurt, and why it is making post-secondary education less accessible and less affordable.

### Ontario's Education System Today

We have seen a fundamental shift away from accessible, needs-based financial aid toward a system that places more burden on students

and families. Ontario has hundreds of thousands of post-secondary students across colleges, universities, and training programs, each with different financial realities and needs. Yet provincial policy increasingly treats student aid as a cost to be reduced rather than an investment in people, skills, and the future of the province.

Across Ontario, students are being squeezed between rising tuition and living costs, and financial aid that no longer keeps pace. While nominal funding for OSAP still exists, the structure has changed significantly, from up to 85% grants down to a max 25% in grants and the rest in loans that students will bear for years, if not decades.



### Key trends include:

- ▶ **Cuts to non-repayable grants** that have reduced upfront support for students, forcing many to take on more debt or reconsider pursuing post-secondary education altogether.
- ▶ **A growing affordability crisis** as housing, food, and transportation costs rise while OSAP support fails to keep up, leaving students financially stretched.
- ▶ **Increased reliance on loans**, shifting the burden onto students and families and increasing long-term debt loads.
- ▶ **Growing disparities between students**, as those from lower-income backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by reduced grants and rising debt burdens.

### Local Voices and Real Impact

Ontario's student financial aid system has long been a critical pathway for students to access post-secondary education. OSAP plays a key role in:

- ▶ Helping students afford tuition and basic living costs
- ▶ Reducing financial barriers for low- and middle-income families
- ▶ Supporting access to education across diverse communities
- ▶ Enabling students to focus on their studies rather than financial survival

### Volunteer Talking Points

- ▶ Start with a local connection: "Students in our community..." or "Young people here..."
- ▶ Explain that affordability is the real problem: "Doug Ford cut OSAP grants and now students are paying the price..."

- ▶ Emphasize who is hurt: "Students take on more debt, families face more pressure, and access to education becomes less equal."
- ▶ Direct people to take action: "Join the campaign, contact your MPP, and spread the word."

### Building & Igniting Our Audience

In order to build a campaign, we first must build capacity. This means reaching out beyond your usual networks to find allies who share your goals and are open to working together. Typically, you will look to groups that are directly affected, activists with an interest in the issue, any politicians who have to care about what these folks think, other progressive orgs, and any other likely prospects you can think of. Do not neglect to reach out to NDP members in your riding, as well as the executive committees of nearby ridings.

Capacity does not appear automatically – it has

to be actively coordinated. Where we set clear timelines, concrete asks, and defined geographic priorities, allies are willing to show up and do real work.

## TACTICS FOR AWARENESS-RAISING

For our SAVE OSAP advocacy we recommend focusing especially on directly contacting government MPPs to let them know their constituents are frustrated and upset by this:

### ▶ Petitions to the Legislature

- Send an email asking them to consider signing our petition and then follow-up with a request for a phone call or coffee.

The Legislature will be back in session in late March, and we should aim to bring as many signatures to the chamber as we can to show how Ontarians feel about this. You can bring petitions with you to events, hold in-person meetings and ask folks to sign, and give them to allied orgs to collect signatures independently. Remember that the pages need to come back to you in order to count.

### ▶ Digital AYNs

- AYNs cannot be directly submitted to the Legislature, but they are effective organizing tools nevertheless, and a huge number on an AYN can serve as a powerful talking point when it comes time to make the case to the government that they're on the wrong track. Post links to these on your social media, bring QR codes to tablings, and ask folks to reshare after they sign.

### ▶ Physical Letters to PC MPPs

- Government members need to feel that their constituents are angry about this if we are going to stop it. This is the optimal task for folks who are not normally super political or partisan, as hearing from those folks will matter more

to government MPPs. If there are local groups who are helping, you can facilitate by providing lists of office addresses, refreshers on how to send letters (you do not need a stamp to send mail to an MPP), and some guidance on what the important points to hit are. If desired, you can use the template on our campaign site.

### ▶ Emails to PC MPPs

- A list of office emails for government members, the Premier, and the Minister of Colleges & Universities are provided on our campaign site. In order to maximize the likelihood of a human being reading your email, it is best to not use identical subject lines.

### ▶ Phone Zaps

- A phone zap is much like an email blitz, except the object is to fill up the entire voicemail boxes of the politicians you're addressing. You will want to get as many folks as possible onto a zoom call, and share a list of phone numbers to call through. Each person calls the numbers, one by one, and leaves a voicemail at each number until the voicemail boxes are all filled.

### ▶ Flyering

- This is fairly straightforward, but can be used to build capacity for everything else. You will want to print a few hundred to a few thousand flyers, and recruit volunteers to get them delivered in strategically-targeted areas. This can be on campuses or just near local MPP's offices. This will get people's attention and hopefully drive signups via QR codes that we can use to recruit for the letter-writing and (especially) email-writing campaigns.

▶ **Canvassing**

- This is by far the most labour-intensive tactic, but also by far the most effective in demonstrating to people that we are serious about this issue. There is no real substitute for actually talking to people in person. You can use Populus to make maps and track where you've been, go knock doors with the petitions. It will be slow going (especially when compared with tabling at a big festival or event), but equally, the process of recruiting folks, training them, and going out canvassing is a great dry run for the kind of organizing we will need to do in the next campaign.

▶ **Media Push**

- Hearing directly from other students matters. That's why we'll support student leaders, their families, post-secondary education workers, and non-profit advocates in sharing their experiences through op-eds, social media campaigns, and conversations with local and community journalists. When people affected by Ford's cuts speak for themselves, it helps build public understanding, solidarity, and momentum for change.

To access more outreach links, social media graphics, AYN pages, or campaign materials (including a printable version of our flyer), please access our website at this link

**<https://saveosap.ca>**

If you want to organize a canvass, phone zap, or townhall in your local community, please contact us at **[organize@ontariondp.ca](mailto:organize@ontariondp.ca)**.