Mr/Ms/Mrs

Street

City, Ontario

Postal code

Date

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs/Minister

My name is \*\*\*. I have been closely watching the story unfold about the mother, Michelle Cousins, who, due to her school board’s lack of a comprehensive accommodations policy, has found herself parking outside her daughter’s school so that her daughter can go to the bathroom. This same mother has had to go to battle with her school board over various other barriers to accessibility, barriers that could have been anticipated if not prevented if a sound accommodations policy existed.

The process of accommodation is often fraught with missteps. There is often a lack of transparency, a lack of forthright communications and an overall lack of accountability.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has detailed in various reports the plight that students with disabilities face within the educational setting. In 2018 they released the “Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities”. They outlined the various barriers that students with disabilities face in the educational setting. They also highlighted that the discrimination wasn’t just the result of individual behaviours but that it was often systemic or institutional in nature.

I believe that it is only with appropriate leadership that must come from outside, specifically from the Ministry of Education, can School Boards resolve the very operational and bureaucratic processes from which repeated and ongoing violations of children’s very basic human rights within the educational setting stem.

Protecting and preserving the human rights of children with disabilities is not something that should be left to the good will of persons within positions of authority, with reassurances that they’ll get around to it.

In 2017, the province appointed the Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) Education Standards Development Committee, to draft recommendations for an accessibility standard in all publicly-funded schools. Those recommendations were drafted in consultation with educators, organizations, and individuals within the disability community. They heard from children with disabilities, and their families.

Those recommendations have sat on the Minister of Education’s desk since the spring of 2022.

The Minister of Education’s office has been silent on these recommendations and has failed to address them in any capacity other than to say there is nothing stopping the individual school Board’s from adopting aspects of these recommendations themselves.

That position, simply put, is a copout.

The Minster of Education has a responsibility and frankly, he is shirking it. He is playing the blame game and pointing fingers elsewhere, when frankly, the responsibility lies squarely on his shoulders.

I, like many residents, refuse to be distracted by broad statements about the amounts of dollars that the Minister has supposedly thrown at the various School Boards. As the adage goes, it is not just about quantity, it is about quality.

There is a need for sound and effective policy to be drafted. There is a need for greater oversight into how those dollars are spent. Standards should be drafted and applied to ensure those precious dollars that Minister Lecce’s office has stated that the government has poured into the various school Boards are dollars well spent and get to those who need it most.

The Ministry of Education has the ability to effect real change and prevent these violations. All children across the province are worthy and deserving of the very protections that are enshrined within the Human Rights Code, to be upheld and enforced within policy, procedures, and best practices in the educational setting.

Your government knows these violations are occurring. The HRTC has detailed this in their policy, and the Committee also highlighted this in their report.

For this government to stand by and do nothing with the knowledge that these violations are taking place, all while this very government has within its hands a comprehensive set of recommendations on how to fix what is broken, makes your government, and its leaders, Minister Lecce and Premier Ford, complicit in these violations. This government, through its inaction, and in essence, through its negligence, continues to allow these violations to persist.

I am writing to ask that you, as my representative, appeal to the Minister of Education, to take immediate action in the review and implementation of these recommendations.

Mahatma Ghandi said, “the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”

This is not about partisan politics. There are no party lines to be drawn here. These recommendations contain within it a means to safeguard the basic human rights of children — dare I say perhaps the most vulnerable of children within educational settings — the very rights that are already enshrined in law. It’s about being a decent human being and doing the right thing.

Sincerely,

Your constituent

Name

Street address

City, Ontario

Postal code

Email

Phone number