



A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN

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February 22, 2017

Aurora College Board of Governors

5004 54th Street

Yellowknife, NT

Dear Board of Governors,

We are writing to express our deep concern with the prospect of eliminating funding for the Social Work and Teacher Education programs at Aurora College.

The mission of the YWCA is to **build safe and equitable communities where women, girls and families can realize their full potential**. We serve the NWT community as advocates for gender equity as well as service providers of emergency family shelters and transitional living for women and families.

The impact of reducing or eliminating social work and teacher education programs in the north disproportionately affects women, who are the vast majority of students impacted. We understand that budget cuts are being asked of the Board but we are confident that other efficiencies or streamlining can accomplish that goal without the deep, negative impact on our community and on women.

Women continue to experience extraordinarily greater risks of personal violence, harassment and gender discrimination. Women make up the vast majority of single parent households. Women are also more likely to find themselves called on to sacrifice their education or careers to care for other family members whether young or old. Women continue to make lower wages than men for the same work and are at greater risk of homelessness. All of these factors create barriers for women continuing their education. Why is another barrier being placed against post-secondary education in the NWT?

It is hardly surprising that areas of post-secondary education that may exhibit slower completion rates overlap with fields that continue to attract a large proportion of women given the continuing, historic litany of other social disadvantages described above. The solution is not to add to those disadvantages any further or underfund these programs but to look for more supportive and more creative ways to encourage students to maintain their academic standing in the face of personal or family challenges.

Student financial assistance cannot replace family or social supports. Cuts to these programs will take away the opportunity for many prospective students to attend any form of post secondary education.

The choice to target these fields undervalues these professions and the benefit to our communities to have professionals with local experience and contextual training. The YWCA deeply values having staff with northern roots who understand the recent impacts of colonialism, residential schools and settlement. We look for opportunities to engage with professionals with personal, educational or experiential understanding of these phenomena that so deeply affect our community. Teachers and social workers who can remain in the north for their studies bring northern context into their classrooms and are vastly better placed to engage these issues and impacts as part of their clinical practices. A southern environment is no replacement for this experience.

We should be looking for ways to ensure northern successes not sending our community's prospective leaders, core service providers and educators to southern institutions. We should not ask what program gets the least quantitative value without acknowledging what programs generate benefit to the Northwest Territories starting as early as practicum students supporting community programs and services. These are questions that impact **every community** across the Territory.

We urge you to think creatively about the Aurora College system as a whole when forced to reckon with broad funding shortages. We hope you will look for efficiencies that help ensure program stability rather than wholesale cuts with the disproportionate impacts we described above.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Wawzonek', with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Caroline Wawzonek, J.D., B.A. Hons.

Vice-Chair, Board of Directors

YWCA NWT

Cc:

Jane Arychuk, Aurora College President

Members of the 18th Legislative Assembly

Annie Boucher, Executive Director, Akaitcho Territory Government

President Bobbie Jo Greenland, Gwich'in Tribal Council

President Garry Bailey, Northwest Territory Métis Nation

Grand Chief Edward Erasmus, Tłı̨chǫ Government

Grand Chief Herb Norwegian, Dehcho First Nations

Chair Duane Ningaqsiq Smith, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation

Chair Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated

Chief Harry Deneron, Acho Dene Koe First Nation

Chief Frieda Martselos, Salt River First Nation

Chief Roy Fabian, Kátł'odeeche First Nation