

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Community Town Hall on Renfrew County Bussing Crisis: Parents, educators, unions call out severe underfunding of school transportation**

RENFREW COUNTY, ON – Approximately 200 parents, community members, and education workers from across Renfrew County, along with NDP MPP and Opposition Education Critic, Chandra Pasma, met during a virtual townhall meeting on the evening of Wednesday, October 2, 2024, to share frustration about the ongoing student bussing crisis in Renfrew County.

Funding cuts to education by the Ford Conservative government have left almost 11,000 Renfrew County students from kindergarten to grade 12 without school bus transportation since the start of the school year.

OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood stated, “It is wholly unacceptable for an entire region to have no school buses, especially in such a large and remote region – and the responsibility for this chaos lands squarely on Doug Ford and his government’s ongoing cuts to public education funding. This is an issue that impacts the whole community, and it is why the community has come together to demand immediate and sustainable funding for school transportation.”

Parents shared stories of having to choose between getting themselves to work and helping their children get to school. Many families told of increased costs downloaded onto them as they try to ensure their kids make it to their schools.

MPP Chandra Pasma said that the bussing crisis in Renfrew County is the “canary in the coal mine” for education funding, as the Ford government is underfunding virtually all areas of education across the province. Pasma shared how she witnessed firsthand the chaos that ensued when bus routes were cut in the Ottawa-area last year. Families were struggling and students were clearly negatively impacted. Now, the situation is even worse in Renfrew County.

The only potential relief to families currently being proposed by both the public and Catholic school boards is to ask the provincial government for direct compensation for parents, instead of calling for adequate public investment in school busses. Parents called on local MPP John Yakabuski, Education Minister Jill Dunlop, and Premier Doug Ford to work together to immediately provide funding to get Renfrew County school buses back on the road.

Concerns were also raised that this crisis and cut in services will happen in other areas of the province.

OSSTF/FEESO president, Karen Littlewood noted that, “The continued impact of cuts to education funding have forced boards of education to make choices about what services to slash to meet the ongoing underfunding in public education. More than 40% of school boards are reporting budget deficits, even after already reducing the services and programs available to students. Once again, the Ford government’s attack on the public education system is hurting the students that our dedicated teachers and education workers serve.”

Joining the parents and community members at the town hall were elected leaders from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) and the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) as well as area presidents of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Locals 1247 and 1321, (ETFO) Renfrew County, Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA) Renfrew Unit, and OSSTF/FEESO District 28.

In response to the overwhelming public outcry about the bus crisis, educational unions across the region came together to launch a letter writing campaign, called “[Renfrew County Kids Need a Ride](#),” to direct community concerns to the politicians with the power to put buses back on the road.

“It’s time Premier Ford, Minister Dunlop, and MPP Yakabuski commit to getting students back on the bus – it’s the least they can do!” said Littlewood.

*OSSTF/FEESO, founded in 1919, has over 60,000 members across Ontario. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education.*

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