

August 21, 2023

The Honourable Marc Miller, PC, MP
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
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The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, PC, MP
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages
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The Honourable Monte McNaughton, MPP
Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
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The Honourable Jill Dunlop, MPP
Minister of Colleges and Universities
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Dear Ministers Miller, Boissonnault, McNaughton and Dunlop:

RE: Supporting International Students in Peel

On behalf of Peel Regional Council, I am writing to draw your attention to the need for stronger support systems and enhanced services for international students in Peel. At its July 6th meeting, Regional Council endorsed the *Brampton Charter for Improving the International Student Experience* (attached), which establishes goals that require your support to address the challenges faced by international students. These challenges include but are not limited to inadequate funding and resources to support newcomer learning, lack of access to safe and affordable housing and income opportunities, impacting their overall health, safety and quality of life.

In Peel, newcomers have played and continue to play a significant role in enriching our diverse cultural fabric and contributing to our communities' economic prosperity. Peel has the highest proportion of immigrants in Ontario, at 18 per cent. Moreover, the number of international students is growing exponentially. Between 2015 and 2022, the number of new international students (i.e., first time study permit holders) in Ontario increased almost three-fold from 64,090 to 238,425. Despite this expansion, recent reports have highlighted the negative living conditions facing international students such as, student's difficulty securing affordable housing and experiences of racism and discrimination.

With approximately 80 Designated Learning Institutions in Peel, this issue is one that disproportionately impacts our communities, particularly given the high growth in international student enrollments:

- Between 2012/13 and 2020/21, public colleges in Ontario experienced a 342 per cent increase in international student enrollments; and
- Between 2015 and 2019, private career colleges in Ontario experienced a 420 per cent increase in international student enrollments.

Much of the rapid rise in international student enrollment has been facilitated by the federal government's International Education Strategy, Ontario's International Postsecondary Education Strategy, and the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. This accelerated rate of growth without additional community investment presents challenges to Peel Region's and the community's ability to appropriately support this population.

Many of the services offered by Peel Region and community providers are inaccessible to international students due to federal and provincial eligibility criteria that excludes individuals without Canadian citizenship or permanent residency, as well as refugee claimants. These systemic gaps need to be addressed urgently through enhanced coordination and collaboration with all levels of government. In the absence of increased government coordination and investment in municipal programs and community infrastructure, it is anticipated that the vulnerability and occurrence of exploitation amongst these students will grow. Further, there is additional concern that community organizations with existing capacity constraints will be unable to support with addressing international students' acute needs and these broader systemic gaps. A broad-based, long-term, sustainable solution is required.

Nando Iannicca
Regional Chair & CEO

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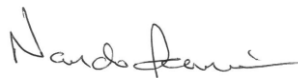
Peel Region, in conjunction with Peel's local municipalities (Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga), Sheridan College, community organizations, and residents, have identified the key issues threatening international students' safety and wellbeing which can be found in the attached Charter. **We ask the federal and provincial governments to work with us and key stakeholders to respond to the Charter's five goals outlined below:**

1. Upholding ethical recruitment standards and practices;
2. Creating academic and wrap-around supports for learners;
3. Promoting safe and affordable housing and financial stability;
4. Providing opportunities for legal and reliable work; and
5. Championing well-defined and transparent pathways to citizenship for international students.

As many of these Charter objectives fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial and federal governments, your leadership is crucial to advancing and meeting these goals. In the absence of improved partnership and coordination between the federal and provincial governments, as well as Peel Region and its local municipalities, our ability to successfully retain and support the wellbeing of international students will fall short.

In closing, I am requesting that we work together to address the important issues facing this unique community and invite you to a joint meeting of all levels of government to discuss a path forward. We look forward to your positive response and the opportunity to collectively support the well-being of international students in Peel for the betterment of our community.

Kindest personal regards,



Nando Iannicca
Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer
Region of Peel

att: Brampton Charter for Improving the International Student Experience

cc: Hon. Sean Fraser, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities
Peel Members of Parliament
Peel Members of Provincial Parliament
Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services
Peter Fay, Clerk, City of Brampton
Laura Hall, Clerk, Town of Caledon
Diana Rusnov, Clerk, City of Mississauga
Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Peel Designated Learning Institutions

Developing the Brampton Community Charter

Summit Lessons to Inform the Charter

Priorities and Values

Students should be welcomed, valued, and understood, and their health and well-being prioritized

Providing Support

Keep micro, meso and macro levels of need and support in mind when addressing student issues

Establishing Trust

Build trust with the international student community

Listening

Listen to student experiences and address the root of the problem

Collaboration

Collaboration with community partners and MPs, MPPs and city counselors is important

Student Experience

International students' resilience, and narratives need to be brought forward

Involvement

Involve current students and recent international student graduates in planning and encourage engagement with the community

Inclusion

We need to build our local cultural competence and include international students as key stakeholder in EDI initiatives

Ethical Practices

Regulation, training and monitoring will enhance ethical practices in international student recruitment and retention

Charter

01

Guiding Principles



02

Goals & Actions



03

Accountability
Measures



Guiding Principles

Appreciate that international student experiences are complex, multifaceted, distinctive, and as heterogeneous as the students themselves.

Respect that international students contribute diverse perspectives that enrich the learning experience for all students and are not competing with domestic students for postsecondary spaces.

Recognize the distinct stressors, atypical obstacles and macro and micro level factors that influence the lives of international students.

Acknowledge the need to view the international student experience holistically beginning from when a student considers studying in Canada to beyond graduation.

Define the international student experience to encompass physical, mental, social, cultural, financial, and academic well-being, which includes immigration, employment, housing, health, racism, food security, language and belonging.

Respond through multi-stakeholder engagement to fill the gaps and bridge the silos that challenge a smooth and seamless international student experience.

Goals

1. Ethical recruitment standards
2. Academic and wrap-around supports in the education system
3. Safe and affordable housing
4. Legal and reliable work
5. Well-defined and transparent pathways to citizenship for international students

GOAL 1: Upholding ethical recruitment standards and practices

Recognizing that financial stability is at the heart of the safety and well-being of the international student experience, postsecondary institutions and Charter signatories commit to the following:

- Inform international applicants early and comprehensively about all related expenses, not just tuition and fees
- Encourage and streamline direct application processes. Where agents are involved, ensure processes are in place to only partner with trustworthy and vetted enrolment agents
- Create a public database of unethical agents
- Provide consistency in tuition and fee policy and protection against substantial increases in international student tuition and fees
- Commit to shared data collection on the international student population, including mapping of changing demographics, enrolment patterns, and international student needs.

GOAL 2: Creating academic and wrap-around supports for learners

Recognizing that academic standards and pedagogical relationships vary considerably across cultures, and that international students need accessible guidance on how to navigate the Canadian academic and social environment, postsecondary institutions and Charter signatories commit to the following:

- Create a hub where students can access accurate, trusted information throughout their journey
- Call on all levels of government to adequately fund community-based non-profits that offer mental health and other supports
- Partner with/advocate to other levels of government/the province for collaboration and funding
- Undertake periodic assessments of available health insurance plans and coverage for international students
- Provide culturally appropriate and multi-lingual health care and supports.
- Create trauma-informed best practices for the more severe cases of international students needing urgent help (suicides or attempted suicides, unexpected pregnancies, homelessness, justice system)
- Facilitate the integration of domestic and international students, promote connections to alumni and create positive engagement opportunities between international students and the community, supported by cross-cultural training
- Work to positively shape the messaging and narratives on the international student experience.

GOAL 3: Promoting safe and affordable housing and financial stability

Postsecondary institutions and all levels of government should work with local partners, the development industry and government to ensure access to safe, affordable and accessible housing both on and off campus and commit.

Signatories commit to:

- Consider housing and transportation opportunities for international students as part of municipal planning
- Support the delivery of affordable student housing through streamlined approvals
- Advocate for and promote safe and legal rental accommodation that is subject to inspection and reporting
- Educate property owners on registration of rental units with the municipality to help meet safety standards
- Educate international students on rights and responsibilities under the Landlord and Tenant Act and facilitating access to affordable legal counsel
- Recognize food insecurity as a growing issue among international students and providing targeted support and resources so that learners can afford both rent and groceries
- Commit to making allocations of a percentage of international student tuition and fees revenue to financial scholarships and financial need for international students.

GOAL 4: Providing opportunities for legal and reliable work

Recognizing that many international students work to support their families back home and pay for their tuition/living expenses, Charter signatories commit to the following:

- Develop targeted experiential education and co-op opportunities for international students, keeping in mind their unique challenges when accessing careers and employability support
- Prevent and reduce exploitation of international students through stronger enforcement of provincial labour laws, especially as they relate to temporary work and the gig economy that many international students rely on during their studies
- Inform international students of their rights as workers and offer provision to connect with appropriate legal complaint and advocacy support services
- Educate employers about the benefits of hiring international students and graduates and the immigration regulations that facilitate their employment
- Engage in advocacy with employers, relevant community organizations and all levels of government to improve employment outcomes for international students and graduates

GOAL 5: Championing well-defined and transparent pathways to citizenship for international students.

Recognize the intergovernmental nature of immigration and settlement related issues to improving the international student experience, each level of government should commit to the following:

- Request the federal government to provide timely, accurate and plain-language information on immigration-related matters including student visas and applications, arrival information, entitlements, and responsibilities, work regulations during and post study, and application for permanent residency and citizenship.
- Request the provincial government to provide clarity to post-secondary graduates on dates and application procedures through the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (ONIP) program.
- Partner with the regional/municipal government to provide increased access to and awareness of recreational, community safety/wellbeing and public health opportunities to ensure a safe and successful transition to permanent residency.

Accountability Measures

Invest in regular data collection from signatories to encourage consistency in data governance and data sharing. Develop systematic reporting of international student profiles in Brampton and Peel Region.

Embed the implementation, monitoring and accountability of this charter within existing structures.

Develop a self-reporting system for signatories to share the investment, implementation, and monitoring of progress toward the calls to action annually.

Introduce recognition measures to celebrate, reinforce and share best practice models.

Commit to promoting continued conversations, fostering constructive dialogue, and advancing mutual learning by sharing insights, good practices, and data-driven reporting on the implementation of the Charter by all signatories. Sharing is envisioned through summits, workshops, and other efforts to strengthen inter-institutional communities of practice.

Publish the Charter and associated links on the websites of all signatories.