

MEDIA RELEASE

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OSSTF/FEESO condemns Islamophobia and hatred

(Toronto)—The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) is deeply troubled by the appalling expressions of Islamophobia recently directed at the Peel District School Board (PDSB) over the board's provision of religious accommodations for Muslim students who wish to partake in Friday prayers.

Mike Bettiol, President of OSSTF/FEESO District 19, representing teachers, occasional teachers and professional student services personnel at the PDSB, issued a statement to his members on March 31 to affirm the union's support for the board on this issue, and to condemn Islamophobic actions.

"I want to let you know that OSSTF District 19 supports inclusivity of all people in Canada and that we deplore speech and actions that support hate of any groups within our community," said Bettiol's statement. Bettiol condemned in particular the actions of a small group who disrupted a recent board meeting with "detestable slurs," and who tore pages from a Qur'an and threw them to the floor, which Bettiol called "an act of horrific disrespect."

OSSTF/FEESO provincial President Paul Elliott said, "The Peel District School Board provides these accommodations not just because it is mandated to do so under the Ontario Human Rights Code, but because it's simply the right thing to do. OSSTF/FEESO supports not only the Peel board, but all the other school boards in Ontario that provide this kind of accommodation. Our members know that we build stronger, more equitable and more dynamic communities by being inclusive, and by speaking out against racism and bigotry wherever we see it."

"OSSTF/FEESO will be looking closely at this issue and considering courses of action to counter these repugnant expressions of hatred," concluded Elliott.

OSSTF/FEESO, founded in 1919, has 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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