



January 24, 2025

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Mr. William McKay
Deputy Minister of Finance
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Dear Madams and Sir,

Re: Aurora College Program and Employment Cuts

I am writing to you about the informal announcement to Aurora College employees regarding the decision to cut programs and job positions, which include Community Learning Centres (CLC) and Literacy Outreach Centres (LOC). The UNW was also formally advised of these cuts by Aurora College.

The Union of Northern Workers is strongly opposed to any such cuts and asks you to review and reconsider this decision.

We are, of course, concerned first and foremost for the workers at Aurora College who will be affected. The impact on their livelihoods, families, and mental health will be incalculable.

But we are also deeply concerned about the impact on the communities of the NWT, particularly the smaller ones and those with already limited access to education opportunities. This decision will cut off entire regions from access to in-person education resources and support.

Learning programs – especially Adult Literacy and Basic Education – should never be chosen for the chopping block to find savings.

To date, the UNW has not been advised of any plans to continue the programs currently offered by the CLCs in a different way.

How will you reach individuals who need these programs? Who will support learners who do not have access to computers and reliable internet, and those who are not computer-savvy?

Who will be on the ground in the communities to provide not just technical support but also emotional and consultive support?

As the Aurora College website states, *“Programming is different in each community as the needs of individual communities differ.”* Across the territory, community campuses address unique challenges that students consider when they choose to further their study.

How will the College understand the individual needs of different communities without being present and part of the community?

We have been advised that these cuts are justified because the CLC program is not operating to capacity. This is not a legitimate excuse for an organization whose entire purpose is to promote learning. Sadly, we have seen the elimination through neglect of numerous public programs and services over the years. When a program is struggling, should it not be reviewed to see what is not working and how it could be improved to better serve communities and residents?

Cuts to education move us further away from what we should be doing as a territory. We should always be looking at strengthening education for northerners. By reducing availability, we further increase the dependency on a strained system to provide for individuals. Placing barriers to education affects residents’ ability to pursue an education which can make them leaders in their communities in the future.”

The UNW has also been advised that this decision was as a result of reviewing the Aurora College structure in anticipation of the transition to a polytechnic university. I would like to remind you of the college’s promises to NWT residents, learners, and communities, that are clearly stated on their website:

“Aurora College is transforming into a polytechnic university and the Community Learning Centres will continue to deliver programs and training for residents in communities across the north.”

- Community Learning Centres page

“Community-based learning has played an important role at Aurora College for more than 50 years and as we continue to transform into a polytechnic university, we will increase access to learning opportunities by having a presence in every community.”

- Community Based Learning page

We, along with UNW members and other residents of the NWT, are tired of broken promises and disingenuous “consultations”.



As I'm sure you are aware, there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UNW and the Employer regarding consultation on the transformation of the college to a polytechnic university. This MOU was negotiated in 2021. To date, this Working Group has met only once. This reduction in workforce and cutting of programs is an obvious topic that should have gone to the Working Group for discussion long before now.

We are aware that in the lead up to this decision, the Employer had asked their own employees to look for areas to cut. It was upsetting and stressful for workers to be put in a position where they had to make suggestions that they knew would put the jobs of their colleagues and friends in jeopardy. This was an insensitive and unacceptable approach.

The many cuts that this government has made in 2024-25 (so far) seem to be targeting small communities and marginalized residents, whether intentionally or not: Fort Smith Correctional Complex, mid-wives, community-based adult learning.

We have heard from our members that there are more cuts planned for Aurora College every year for the next three years. If this is accurate, we call upon you to be honest and transparent with your plans so that we can work together in good faith to reduce the negative impacts on a stable NWT workforce and our small communities.

Sincerely,


Gayla Thunstrom
UNW President

cc: Pam Reid, Director Labour Relations
UNW Full Executive
PSAC National President Sharon DeSousa
PSAC North Regional Executive Vice President Josée-Anne Spirito
All NWT MLAs