



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

February 1, 2024

BY EMAIL: premier@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable David Eby, M.L.A.
Premier of British Columbia
PO BOX 9041 STN Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier:

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) representing 72,000 academic and professional staff at over 120 universities and colleges in Canada. We are deeply troubled by the political interference of the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills into an internal staffing matter at Langara College.

According to information we have received, Langara College conducted an internal investigation of Dr. Natalie Knight in relation to comments she had made at a demonstration about the Israel-Gaza conflict on October 28th, 2023. During the investigation, Dr. Knight was placed on paid leave. The internal investigation concluded that Dr. Knight's comments did not violate the law or any internal policies. Subsequently, Dr. Knight was informed on January 18th, 2024, that she would be returned to her teaching duties. The College issued Dr. Knight a letter of expectation which is non-disciplinary in nature.

At a lawful demonstration on January 23rd, Dr. Knight publicly announced that she had been exonerated and would be returning to the classroom. Two days later, on January 25th, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills shared a statement by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) on her X social media account calling for Dr. Knight to be terminated. In her comments, the Minister wrote: "I am disappointed this instructor [Dr. Knight] continues to have a public post secondary [sic] platform to spew hatred and vitriol. I have met with @langaracollege to express my concerns for the Langara and broader communities. They agree everyone deserves to feel safe." The next day, Dr. Knight was terminated.

We are also aware that the Minister spoke at an event organized by B'nai B'rith on January 30th entitled "An Evening with Our Jewish Public Officials." During her presentation which is available on-line, she spoke approvingly about Dr. Knight's termination and revealed specific details about the case that indicate the Minister likely had intimate knowledge of or access to the investigatory report and the letter of expectation issued Dr. Knight. If true, this would constitute a serious violation of Dr. Knight's privacy rights in employment matters.

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The Minister's intervention in this case, including meeting with the Langara administration and publicly denouncing Dr. Knight even after she was cleared of wrongdoing, is contrary to the widely recognized principle of institutional autonomy. Universities and colleges, by statute and practice, are given broad authority over managing their internal academic affairs, including staffing matters. The central importance of institutional autonomy is highlighted in the *1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel* to which Canada is a signatory. Article V. A. 18 states: "Autonomy is the institutional form of academic freedom and a necessary precondition to guarantee the proper fulfilment of the functions entrusted to higher-education teaching personnel and institutions."

Political interference into the affairs of universities and colleges must never be countenanced as it undermines their independence and the academic freedom of faculty that is necessary to preserve, share, and advance knowledge. By intervening publicly and directly with the College administration concerning Dr. Knight's expressed views, the Minister has violated these fundamental principles.

Further, it is well understood that political meddling in any matter involving an investigation or hearing must always be avoided. As in investigations conducted by law enforcement agencies or tribunals, it is also entirely inappropriate for a government official to weigh in on employment-related investigations. To do so is to risk prejudicing the outcome. Consequently, the Minister's publicly stated support for terminating Dr. Knight during the investigation and even after she was cleared of any misconduct is profoundly disturbing.

Considering these facts, I call upon you to ask for the Minister's resignation. The Minister has demonstrated a lack of respect for institutional autonomy and academic freedom and in so doing has lost the trust of the academic community in British Columbia and across Canada.

Yours sincerely,



David Robinson
Executive Director

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Cc: Mr. Kevin Falcon, M.L.A., Leader of the Official Opposition of British Columbia (kevin.falcon@bcliberals.com)
Dr. Peter McInnis, CAUT President (president@caut.ca)
Dr. Michael Arfken, Chair, CAUT Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee (chair-aft@caut.ca)