

Dear Premier,

We are writing to express our deep concern about the “Commission on Broader Public Service Reform” announced in the provincial budget in April. According to the initial announcement, the Commission has been struck to review all of Ontario’s public services. Our concerns are threefold:

1. The mandate of the Commission and the ideas for public sector reform as outlined in the 2011 Provincial Budget reflect a pro-privatization and pro-marketization ideology that is not based on evidence. Some of the privatization measures proposed in the budget have an indisputable track-record in England and in other countries, where privatizing public services to profit-seeking corporations has driven up costs, fostered inequity and reduced quality. This ideology is incompatible with both the stated goal of sustainability and with public values.
2. Don Drummond, who has been named to lead the Commission, has made repeated public statements in support of privatizing our public not-for-profit health care institutions and services. These statements are in direct contradiction to both your government’s promise to safeguard public/non-profit health care in Ontario and the stated parameters of the Commission as outlined in the Budget Speech by your Finance Minister.
3. Don Drummond comes from TD Economics and we believe that his appointment to review the entire public service to determine what services are to be privatized puts him in a conflict of interest. TD Economics is part of the TD Bank Financial Group. TD Bank and TD Securities Inc. are investors in the Niagara privatized P3 hospital. TD Insurance sells private health insurance.

Premier McGuinty, this Commission should be disbanded. If your government is seeking ideas for improving public services and reducing waste, such a project must be thoughtful and balanced. Principles that reflect the values and priorities of Ontarians should guide the process and frame the options considered. These principles should include cornerstone public values of equity and accessibility. The leader of the Commission should be seen to embody these values, not to act as a pundit for the private interests of Ontario’s financial and insurance sectors. In fact, Don Drummond actually argued against principles of accessibility, universality and equity in his paper on health care commissioned by the Ministry of Health released last autumn.

Furthermore, any process to generate ideas and recommendations for reform should be democratic and engage the expertise and experiences of citizens and public servants. So-called evidence on international experiments with public sector reform should be subject to open discussion to test the validity of the claims. The issues at stake are serious and the public assets at threat of privatization are significant. These decisions about the future ownership and control could be difficult if not impossible to reverse. They should not be entrusted to a biased process.

Your government ran two elections with protecting public non-profit health care as a central campaign promise. In his Budget Speech, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan stated that the Commission would not recommend privatization of health care and education. Yet Mr. Drummond continues to use the platform afforded to him by your government's appointment to repeatedly promote the privatization of health care delivery.

In a Globe and Mail interview published shortly after the budget was released, Don Drummond is quoted as stating that despite the restrictions announced by the Finance Minister, his was willing, to look at "almost anything", including health care and education:

"While it is clear that politicians and citizens want a single public payer for health care – in other words, a publicly funded system – "people are much less troubled right now by private-sector delivery," he said."

Lest you believe that this is simply an objective observation, in a Toronto Star Opinion Piece in February, Drummond made this same assertion about health care privatization and called it "good news". He reiterated this pro-privatization rhetoric in recent speeches at Queen's University and in Ottawa. All this, despite evidence that profit-driven clinics have engaged in promoting user fees and extra billing of patients, undermining single-tier Medicare and violating the Canada Health Act.

In fact, Mr. Drummond co-wrote the TD Economics' report on health care commissioned by the Ministry of Health last year, in which the authors recommended that your government "throw the door open" to the privatization of health care delivery systems and experimentation with two-tier health care (see pages 8,9,20 and 23).

In fact, Mr. Drummond and his co-authors criticized the Romanow Commission for putting access to health care at the centre of their study on the future of health care in Canada. Mr. Drummond's report was ideological and rife with inaccuracies and contradictions. A number of recommendations were made without any supporting evidence whatsoever. We have provided you with our analysis of that report last fall and we enclose it here again. (a link is here: <http://www.web.net/~ohc/healthspendingreportsep2010.pdf>)

Premier, it is not acceptable for a figure promoted to a prestigious position by your government to repeatedly use over-the-top crisis rhetoric (health care is a "Pac Man" eating the provincial budget) that is false (if anything is "eating the provincial budget" it is tax cuts, not health care) and propound privatization. All this while your government claims at the same time to support public health care. In light of his appointment, are we to treat Mr. Drummond's public

comments as a change in your government's stated policies?

Premier, we are asking that you release the Mandate and Terms of Reference for this Commission. Further, we request information as soon as possible on how organizations such as ours will be consulted and what the projected timelines for the Commission's work will be. Finally, we request the names of individuals and organizations that Don Drummond and any of the Commission staff meet with, along with copies of any submissions received by the Commission. At the very minimum, the activities of the Commission should be on the public record with robust opportunity for public scrutiny.

Regards,
Natalie Mehra
Director