

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Statement from MPP Kathleen Wynne regarding Bill 172 Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in Ontario Schools

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) refers to a range of conditions which occur in individuals who suffer permanent brain injury as a result of prenatal alcohol exposure. Individuals living with FASD and their families endure many challenges, and one of the most significant is navigating the education system.

Bill 172 would require school boards to develop policies regarding FASD which, in addition to promoting awareness and understanding of FASD, would require the establishment of best practices and the creation of strategies for the identification of students who have diagnosed or suspected FASD, and for providing accommodation for those pupils. The bill would also require that teachers and early childhood educators be taught strategies to accommodate the needs of students who have diagnosed or suspected FASD, in addition to an awareness of the signs and symptoms.

The combination of deficits children with FASD face can make attending school a tremendously difficult experience. However, many school boards do not have policies addressing FASD, while teachers and early childhood educators often lack awareness of FASD and of strategies to accommodate the needs of these children.

Recent research indicates that 2-3% of 7-9 year old students attending school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) meet the diagnostic criteria for FASD. FASD is also estimated to be more prevalent in Canada than autism spectrum disorder and Down syndrome. Despite the high rate of prevalence, many children with FASD are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, due in large part to various diagnostic challenges and the stigma associated with FASD. Meanwhile, those who have been diagnosed still encounter educational professionals who lack an adequate understanding and awareness of FASD. As a result, children with FASD are frequently saddled with unrealistic expectations and receive insufficient support, leading to poor school outcomes for them personally and often a disrupted classroom experience for their peers as well.

This is an issue that merits considerable and immediate attention, which is why I have introduced legislation to address FASD in Ontario schools. In recent weeks, I have had the pleasure of meeting with many stakeholders, including individuals living with FASD, parents and support groups, FASD advocates, and educational professionals. I have received their feedback and applied it to my private member's bill, entitled the *Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), 2020*.

School boards, teachers, and early childhood educators can create an environment in which students with FASD can succeed, if they have the necessary knowledge and understanding of FASD, and if there are policies in place to address it. If passed, Bill 172 would lead to better outcomes for students with FASD. I encourage my fellow MPPs to support the bill, and I hope that through its introduction we can raise awareness of FASD across the province.

For more information:
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Supportive Statements

"Children living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) experience incredible challenges in the educational system. MPP Kathleen Wynne's Private Member's Bill has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of children and adults living with FASD, their families and caregivers, and the communities in which they live. Through improving learning outcomes, this bill has the potential to positively impact future rates of homelessness, drug use, addictions, and conflict with the law. By increasing awareness among educators, the bill will help children with FASD move through our education system, leading to many additional positive social outcomes in the future."

- **Sophie Kiwala**, former MPP for Kingston and the Islands

"The challenges that families raising children with FASD must navigate on a daily basis in our education system are a major source of stress and family disruption. We need to change the narrative from one of exclusion and conflict to one of support and understanding. Children with FASD can and will learn in an environment that recognizes their individual strengths and capabilities. They learn in different ways and at different rates compared to typically developing children, and it's only through an awareness that this is a child with a brain injury, that we can change the story from one of struggle to one of success."

- **James N. Reynolds, PhD** – Professor in the Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences at Queen's University, and Chief Scientific Officer of the Kids Brain Health Network

"FASD is the result of permanent brain damage. While it cannot be cured, children with FASD can succeed in school if educators are trained to provide modern brain-based neurobehavioural supports, provided those supports are made available to students. I believe that MPP Kathleen Wynne's bill is an important first step to a brain-based neurobehavioural approach to education in Ontario which will support the needs of students with FASD, as well as those with brain-based learning differences in general."

- **Mary Cunningham** – Owner of KWC FASD Consulting, member of the FASD Ontario Network of Expertise and head of its Education Action Group, and has also had the privilege of parenting a person with FASD.

"Children with FASD are scattered throughout many agencies, programmes, and services that attempt to meet their needs, often with limited resources and understanding. However, every child with FASD is in school. When we develop policies and strategies designed specifically to meet their needs in the education system we will reach 100 percent of kids with FASD. The long-term benefits of this Bill will be immeasurable."

- **Len Whalen** – Coordinator of the FASD Parent Action Group of Southeastern Ontario, and member of the Special Education Advisory Committee for the Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board.

"FASD is estimated to affect more than 500,000 people in Ontario and is more prevalent than Autism, Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida, and Cerebral Palsy combined. Despite this, FASD is the least known and supported neurological disorder in Ontario. MPP Wynne's bill represents a critical first step to promote greater awareness and understanding of FASD, and the focus on training for educational professionals will benefit the more than 60,000 children estimated to have FASD in Ontario. The Ontario FASD Action Network (OFAN) sincerely hopes that all MPPs support this Bill."

- **Mark Courtepatte** – Ontario FASD Action Network (OFAN)

"On behalf of the Toronto FASD Network, I'd like to thank MPP Wynne for introducing this bill. We will encourage all City of Toronto MPPs to support it, knowing what a difference it will make in the lives of students affected by FASD and their families."

- **Sharron Richards** - Co-chair of the Toronto FASD Network