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## **Students call on Premier, Mayor to provide safe transit as school starts**

September 17th, 2020 (TORONTO, ON) — High school and post-secondary students are calling on Premier Ford and Mayor Tory to provide more TTC funding and service as classes return. Organizations representing hundreds of thousands of young people, including 140,000+ post-secondary students, released an open letter at a press conference Thursday morning about the urgent need to address crowding on public transit.

“We as students should not feel scared to go back to school, because we risk having to take a crowded bus,” said Scarborough high school student Zain Khurram. “Transit access should not become a barrier to receive an education.”

“Students need safe and equitable access to public transportation during a global pandemic and beyond,” said Muntaka Ahmed, President of the University of Toronto Students’ Union. Students will soon begin commuting to the University of Toronto – St. George campus, which has implemented a hybrid in-person and online learning model.

Student groups are urging Mayor Tory to provide as much TTC service as possible to ensure physical distancing, and say that Premier Ford must provide permanent transit operations funding to make this possible. The provincial and federal governments have jointly provided \$404 million to the TTC this Fall, but the TTC faces a \$700 million shortfall by the end of 2020.

“In addition to paying multiple transit fees on various transit systems to get to campus, students are faced with overcrowded and underfunded public transit systems in the midst of a pandemic,” said Mitra Yakubi, President of the University of Toronto – Mississauga Students’ Union. Many post-secondary students commute across multiple Greater Toronto Area transit systems.

Student groups also raised concerns about provincial funding conditions that would require municipalities to review “low performing routes” before accessing the second phase of Safe Restart transit funding in 2021. Students said that the conditions could negatively impact students who rely on TTC buses, especially in suburban areas.

“How are students expected to succeed academically when transit in Scarborough poses a massive barrier for many?” said Scarborough Campus Students’ Union VP External Eesha Chaudhry. “The fight for accessible education is incomplete without the fight for accessible transit.”

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MEDIA CONTACT: Muntaka Ahmed, President, University of Toronto Students’ Union (president@utsu.ca, 647-518-5143)