

Co-Op Student's Death Highlights Gaps in Workplace Protections for Young Workers

Toronto – Last Friday, high school co-op student Adam Keunen died in a workplace accident in West Lincoln, Ontario. This is the third death of a student engaged in a workplace training program in Ontario over the past ten months. Members of the Canadian Intern Association and Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of these young workers. We also urge that every action be taken to ensure that tragedies like this are not repeated.

Over the past decade work-integrated learning has emerged as a key part of Ontario's secondary and post-secondary education system. Currently, students engaged in unpaid work-integrated learning programs are not covered under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)* or the *Employment Standards Act, 2000 (ESA)*. Additionally, students only receive protection under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA)* under certain conditions.

These exclusions have real implications. As Amanda Moore reported in the Grimsby Lincoln News, the exclusion of co-op students from OHSA meant that it was the Niagara Regional Police that led the investigation into the workplace accident, rather than the Ministry of Labour, who normally investigates such incidents.

To close these loopholes, the Canadian Intern Association and Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams call upon the Ontario government to bring co-op students and interns under OHSA by passing Minister of Labour Kevin Flynn's *Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act*, and to grant them other basic workplace protections under the ESA by passing MPP Peggy Sattler's *Greater Protection for Interns and Vulnerable Workers Act*.

More broadly, these tragic incidents necessitate that the Ontario government undertake a fulsome review of co-ops, academic internships and experiential learning programs to ensure the safety and well being of students and young workers is being protected. This type of review is not without precedence in Canada as the Government of Alberta launched a similar review in the wake of death of Andy Ferguson, who died while completing an academic internship at a radio station.

In the weeks ahead, both the Canadian Intern Association and Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams will be putting forward solutions that can improve workplace safety for students and give them critical protections while engaged in the school to work transition.

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