

Canadian Union of Public  
Employees (CUPE)



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**RETRANSMISSION: Provincial Underfunding of Mental Health Services for Children and Youth Brings Ottawa Centre to the Brink**

**Why isn't youth mental health a priority for the Liberal government?**

OTTAWA, ONTARIO—(Marketwire - May 13, 2009) - The chronic underfunding of mental health services for Ontario's children and youth has brought one Ottawa agency to the brink of closure, says the union representing roughly 150 workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

"The provincial government has flat-lined funding for children and youth mental health services for most of the past 15 years," says Marcus Błaszczyk, Vice-President of CUPE 2376. "This slow-moving funding train wreck is now crashing into the reality that the need for services has gone up and up, but the funding hasn't kept pace. Why isn't the mental health of Ontario children and youth a priority for this government?"

The Roberts/Smart Centre is the only residential care centre for teenagers with serious psychiatric problems in Ottawa, and only one of two with a secure unit for those with severe challenges. Its board of directors is exploring bankruptcy to wind down the centre's operations as a way to honour its obligations to employees and suppliers, and will invoke it on May 30 if funding isn't found. Workers and management have suspended contract negotiations to focus on obtaining adequate, multi-year funding from the McGuinty government.

"Both the employer and the union agree that the problem is lack of adequate provincial funding for agencies providing mental health services for children and youth," says Błaszczyk. "The provincial government has not even kept funding up to match inflation, even though the needs are growing year by year. Closing Roberts/Smart is not an option. The government must show that the mental health of children and youth is a priority."

**For more information, please contact**

CUPE 2376  
Marcus Błaszczyk  
Vice-President  
Cell: 613 252 2997

or

CUPE Communications  
David Robbins  
Cell: 613 878 1431

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