

NEWS RELEASE

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The Failure of Second Career

For a government program that is touted as helping people, the Second Career program gets a failing grade. Launched by the McGuinty Liberals in June 2008, it was advertised as assistance for laid-off workers to find jobs in their communities. In practice, what individuals found was too much red-tape and confusion around the application process.

Premier McGuinty announced \$355 million towards Second Career in the government's 2008 budget. The new program is funded by both the federal and provincial government through the Canada – Ontario Labour Market Agreement.

The program provides laid-off workers, who qualify, with financial support and skills training to help them find jobs in high demand.

Second Career, which had initial plans to help 20,000 people, came to a screeching halt in September, when it ran out of money, seemingly overnight, leaving a reported 10,000 applications hanging in the balance.

Many applications had been in progress for more than six months. Applicants had been required to attend multiple assessment appointments, often travelling to Brampton for appointments. Some had received verbal approval but had not received funds because of their course start date.

In November the program was re-launched with new guidelines and restrictions that now disqualify or limit the funding once available for applicants.

Since September, I have heard from a number of individuals whose applications were complete and they were waiting for their course to start when the program was suspended. Those same individuals are now finding they are no longer eligible; or the funding they were expecting is insufficient to pay for their course. People looking for answers from the Ministry are upset and the appeal process appears to be a further roadblock for many.

Also adding to the sting of being let down by the government, some individuals have found out that qualified applications received by the Ministry later in the year received funding, without delay, because of course dates that started sooner than their own. It is clear the program was not delivered on a first-come-first-serve basis and this has proven an unfair practice for those left behind. My colleague Progressive Conservative MPP Jim Wilson and Critic for Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities called for the government to reconsider those applications submitted before the September review

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using the original guidelines. This would have been an equitable solution but the Liberals refused.

The program changes are described by many individuals as a slap in the face by the government. Applicants are angry and frustrated. After many months of paperwork and research – a requirement to seek out information on courses, career choices, job prospects and being once accepted, the rejection now is a bitter pill to swallow.

Second Career had already received a fair share of negative press when it was reported that the initial guidelines were too narrow and full of red-tape but at least it offered some hope. Now, individuals are finding themselves out of options and still out of work.

Last week, I was asked if I was surprised by a 20% increase in the number of individuals on social assistance. My answer is NO. We have lost 330,000 manufacturing jobs under the McGuinty Liberals. This is proof the recession is really hurting families. It's clear that the training program to help Ontarians get back to work; Second Career has not lived up to its name.

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