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## **Coalition Outraged at Ford Government Response to Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission: “Total Failure in Leadership, no Conscience”**

Toronto – Premier Doug Ford returned to the Legislature today after being unavailable to respond, even virtually, to the Long-Term Care Commission Report for days. His Minister of Long-Term Care belatedly allowed journalists to question her today. Still, there has been no apology or meaningful acknowledgement of the failures that allowed -- even facilitated -- the deaths of thousands in long-term care, reported the Ontario Health Coalition. The Ford government’s response has deeply offended and angered families, residents, care workers and their organizations.

“Ontarians are outraged, and so are we. It is the most visceral wave of anger that we have ever seen,” reported Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition who has heard from hundreds of irate Ontarians watching the government’s response. “It is a total failure in leadership. Leaders in the Ford government have shown absolutely no conscience and have refused to apologize. Throughout the pandemic and now as the reports on the terrible lack of care and inadequacy of their response have come in, the Ford government has still has not committed to act urgently to fix the terrible lack of care in long-term care,”

On Monday, after scheduling a short press conference just prior to the Legislature’s Question Period on the LTC Commission’s Report, the Minister took questions from only three reporters before walking out as journalists beseeched her to answer their queries. Requests from the Queen’s Park media corps for the Minister to come back and answer questions Monday and Tuesday were not heeded. She finally took questions today, but there was no apology and much deflection of responsibility.

Almost 4,000 long-term care residents and staff have died as a result of COVID-19 so far, many in conditions that are so harrowing they have left caregivers and families traumatized. Untold numbers have died of malnutrition, dehydration, isolation and neglect during the pandemic. Tens of thousands of others involved in long-term care have been harmed-- among those many who will not recover. The Ontario Health Coalition released its summary and analysis of the Commission’s report and recommendations today, highlighting the strongest recommendations, those that are problematic -- particularly with regards to privatization -- and a call for urgent action.

Despite the fact that the Commission pressed as the top priority the need to fast-track increases in staffing to reach a minimum standard of 4-hours of care, the Minister has not announced any such plan. The policy decision of the Ford government has been to delay this increase in staffing and care until 2024-25. While they have not committed to fast-track getting care to a safe standard, on Monday, the Minister had already consulted with the for-profit long-term care sector on proposals to change how they finance and build long-term care homes.

“The Ford government continues to demonstrate that it is entirely captured by the priorities and interests of the for-profit corporations in long-term care with which they have very close ties,” reported Ms. Mehra. “Yet again, the Minister prioritized the for-profit financing and construction of new long-term care homes even when there is horribly inadequate care for existing long-term care residents. They do everything for the for-profits and have done nothing substantive to improve care for residents and conditions for staff which remain worse than before the pandemic. It is appalling.”