

Thebacha Leadership Council

Thebacha / Fort Smith



21 January 2026

OPEN LETTER TO:

- Board of Governors of Aurora College,
- Minister, Department of Education, Culture and Employment,
- Members, Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories,

Protect Aurora College's Northern Campuses / Use Existing Infrastructure First

The Thebacha Leadership Council (TLC) is issuing this statement to clearly and unequivocally express their significant concerns regarding recent news articles reporting on what was seen as growing momentum behind a proposal that suggests a path towards establishing a new Aurora College campus in Yellowknife's Centre Square Mall.

The TLC is advocating that Aurora College must choose to make responsible choices!

It must choose to ensure that space and resources at existing campuses are fully utilized – It must choose to strengthen the campuses that already exist with improved programming and support services – It must choose to commit to a better educational institute before developing any “shiny new campuses”.

A new campus must only happen after existing facilities are fully utilized and when all campuses are adequately supported and resourced. Anything else undermines responsible use of public funds, regional equity and, reconciliation.

Aurora College was never intended to be a single-city institution. It was designed as a territorial college, serving the entire NWT through a distributed campus model that reflects the realities, cultures, and economies of the North.

Both Fort Smith and Inuvik already possess significant underused Aurora College infrastructure: - classrooms sit empty - shops, labs, student spaces operate well below capacity - community partnerships that are not being fully leveraged.

Before spending 10's of million dollars retrofitting commercial retail spaces, a responsible or fiscally sound approach is simple - Use what you already have! Fill classrooms that already exist and, invest in strengthening the programs and supports that are already in place.

Public funds should not be used to build new - while existing infrastructure sits unused - while graduates head south to continue their education because of a lack of program options - while communities are told to “make do” with less.

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The TLC encourages all NWT communities to join our *Call to Action*:

- that Aurora College's Board of Governors and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment rejects a plan that may weaken Fort Smith and Inuvik existing campuses;
- the GNWT pause and critically assess long-term consequences of further centralization of programs, services and infrastructure investment;
- that community and territorial leaders as well as residents need to speak out before any irreversible decisions are made.

Anything else sends a troubling message - that communities are expendable, that the College's regional campus model is in jeopardy and, that community and regional decision-making capacity only exists until it becomes politically convenient to centralize it.

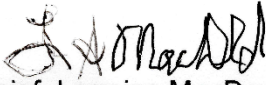
Thebacha Leadership Council (TLC)



President, Allan Heron
Fort Smith Metis Council



Chief, Toni Heron
Salt River First Nation



Chief, Lorraine MacDonald
Thebatthie Denesuline Nation



Mayor, Dana Fergusson
Town of Fort Smith

Cc: Member of Parliament
Honorable Rebecca Alty
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty
Minister of Indigenous Services

Cc: Mayors and Councils - NWT cities, towns, hamlet, villages
Chiefs and Councils - NWT First Nations
Presidents and Councils - NWT Metis Councils

