



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

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EVIDENCE

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

So our next witness is Elizabeth Galvin. Elizabeth, I'll ask you to start by stating your full name and spelling your first and last name for the record.

Elizabeth Galvin

My name is Elizabeth Galvin. And it's E-L-I-Z-A-B-E-T-H, and Galvin is G-A-L-V-I-N.

Shawn Buckley

I'll also ask you to move the microphone a little closer because you have a soft voice. And I'll ask if you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth today.

Elizabeth Galvin

I will.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you're here to share actually a very sad story about three different young ladies. And so, can you share with the commissioners what I'm referring to?

Elizabeth Galvin

My daughter, Danielle, died by suicide in January 2022, a day after her 20th birthday. The week before that, another second-year student at the University of Guelph died by suicide. They didn't know each other. At the time, the University of Guelph administration had closed their campus to in-person learning, campus activities, even though the university had mandated students be fully vaccinated before starting school that year. Their decision followed Doug Ford's decision—

Shawn Buckley

So I'm going to just ask you not to read. And I—

Elizabeth Galvin

Sorry.

Shawn Buckley

And you were going to tell us about three young people.

Elizabeth Galvin

Yes.

That same week, a 20-year-old young woman in Mississauga named Suri, she also died by suicide alone in her apartment. Because at the time, our province was locked down again for— Doug Ford's administration said two weeks. And then maybe three weeks, maybe longer. So that was the atmosphere when these three young women died by suicide.

Shawn Buckley

Now, just so that the audience and the commissioners understand: These three young women basically would have been of the same cohort, graduating from high school at the same time?

Elizabeth Galvin

Yes, so in March 2020 when it all started, these girls were all in their last year of high school. Now Grace, who was in second-year university at the same time that my daughter was, she was from the U.S. But Suri was from Ontario, from the south. And so, they were—

The high schools, if you remember back to March 2020—all the schools were closed. Just slammed shut one day. These Grade 12s finished the last three and a half months of their school year learning virtually. After a couple of months, they had almost no instruction. What the teachers did was they used their marks up to March 2020 to figure out their final marks. These were the kids that were preparing to go to post-secondary school in the fall. Their last year of high school, they had no prom, no graduation, no Grade 12 end-of-year, end-of-high-school trip. Nothing. There was nothing for these kids. They had an online graduation. We tried to make it as fun as possible, but—

Shawn Buckley

How did your daughter respond to— Because, I know I had a daughter and she was so excited about the high school graduation. And planning parties with her friends and the dress and the whole thing. How did Danielle respond to basically losing out on something that most young ladies look forward to for years?

Elizabeth Galvin

Well, she was sad about it. It was isolating. We were all very isolated at the time, if you remember. And so we just had a family, you know, event. We watched it on— It was a virtual graduation. The school did a video and they streamed it and we watched that. But

she was thinking ahead to the fall. And we all thought that by September things would be back to normal, so we just tried to concentrate on looking ahead.

[00:05:00]

Shawn Buckley

So in March, when they're closing down the high schools, Danielle had to be making a decision right around then about the following year, didn't she?

Elizabeth Galvin

Yeah, I think February 1st is the deadline to apply for post-secondary. Going into the summer though, there were not a lot of jobs for these kids because so many businesses were shut down, as Catherine talked about. She was actually looking forward to working at Ford, where her late father had worked for 20-something years and that would have helped her to save money for post-secondary. But they weren't hiring students that year. So she had two minimum-wage jobs, but one of them was at a dry cleaner's and it closed down. So she only had one minimum-wage job.

But June 1st is an important date.

Shawn Buckley

That's when she had to make a decision.

Elizabeth Galvin

June 1st is the deadline for the Grade 12s—was that year—to accept offers from universities. At that time, the universities had announced their intentions for September: what it was going to look like; whether it would be virtual learning or in-person learning; and more importantly, whether their residences would be open. Residence is such an important part of going away to school to spread your wings and meet other people and, you know, mature. McMaster announced they wouldn't open their residences. Queen's announced that they would open their residences, but only to single rooms. So those first-year kids knew that they may or may not get a room at Queen's. Western University and Guelph University announced that they would open their residences fully.

So on June 1st, by midnight, we had to make a decision. Danielle and her sister and I sat there going back and forth. Danielle's older sister was going into fourth year at Western. So Danielle couldn't decide between Western and Guelph. But a really important part of that decision was residence. And she decided on Guelph. So that was that.

Two days later, Guelph University came back and said, "Nope, we're not opening our residences." What happens when you accept an offer through the Central Application Centre is all the other offers are rescinded. What these kids were accepting and buying: they were buying an education. They weren't going to get the product that they thought they were going to get. And it was two days after that very important deadline. So I started—I called the university, I called my MPP, I called the Minister of Colleges and Universities. I'm like, "Can they do this?"

When I talked to somebody at the University of Guelph, they told me that the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit advised them not to open their residences, so they didn't. I

don't know why the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit was running Guelph University. But apparently, that was it.

Shawn Buckley

So—

Elizabeth Galvin

And the Minister of Colleges and Universities— Went to my MPP, Effie Triantafilopoulos, and she talked to the Minister on my behalf, Ross Romano. And we were told—

Shawn Buckley

I'm going to ask you not to read please. Sorry.

Elizabeth Galvin

That the Ministry does not usually interfere with the operations of colleges and universities. So no standard.

Shawn Buckley

So basically, it was a bait and switch for Daniel. She chose Guelph because they were representing that the residences would be open and she can have that experience.

Elizabeth Galvin

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

She chooses. As soon as you choose, that's it—you're pulled out of the system. She couldn't choose to go to Western after that. And then two days later after her choice, they basically say they're closing the residence.

Elizabeth Galvin

Yep.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you fought and fought and fought and got her into residence. But it wasn't normal residence, was it?

Elizabeth Galvin

I got a group of parents together and we lobbied the university and got a meeting with one of the vice provosts, lovely woman. And some of the kids in that group of families that we were talking with each other—some of them just said they're not going to go to first year. They're going to postpone it a year. Some students tried to get into other schools. Some of them were successful, some of them weren't.

Shawn Buckley

Liz, it's just that I'm looking at the clock and we have six minutes. So I want you to just focus on Danielle's experience when she went in September, 2020.

[00:10:00]

Elizabeth Galvin

Okay. So September, 2020, first-year university was like this: no frosh week, no clubs or sports, no in-person classes—it was virtual—no varsity sports. But no discount on any of the fees. They paid their full fees to go. Residence itself, she was in Lenox Addington. Two kids at this end of the hall, two kids way at the other end of the hall. It was like *The Shining* hotel. Long, dimly-lit hallway with closed, locked, unmarked doors. Only two kids to a bathroom. The cafeteria in that residence was closed.

But education delivery was even worse. Four out of five of my daughter's professors did not deliver a virtual lecture. They basically sent them emails, told them what to read, told them what book to buy and read, and, you know, "The test is on Thursday, good luck." She was forced to do a lot of self-learning. No discount on tuition—I'm not sure if I mentioned that. By comparison, Western University, where my other daughter was going, that school mandated that their professors provide a virtual lecture to their students; all the profs had to do that. And they did. And it was much better. And the residences were fully functional and everybody was fine.

Shawn Buckley

Liz, what happened in November 2020?

Elizabeth Galvin

In November 2020, while Danielle was living in this bleak residence—it was so, just, Deadsville. She attempted suicide. She left a message to a friend who found her. Anyways, was rushed to Guelph Hospital. I get a call. My other daughter and I—because she was learning virtually as well, so she was at home—we went running up there. And the hospital wouldn't let me in "because of COVID." They wouldn't let me in. My 18-year-old daughter is in a life-or-death situation, and they wouldn't let me in. And they would barely talk to me. They couldn't talk to me and tell me what was going on because she was 18.

I didn't know what to do. We stood in that parking lot at three in the morning just— Anyways, eventually, we went home. But nobody would talk to me about, and tell me what to do, and give me some guidance. They released her in less than 72 hours. I've since obtained the file from the hospital. Every— Every time they could check it off, it said, "danger to herself," "danger to herself," "danger to herself." Yet they released her. I just— I don't know why. I've made calls in to them; I'm not finished talking to them yet. But they could have put her into an inpatient program called Homewood. And they didn't.

Christmas comes. She comes home. She decides she's going to move out of that residence. She's going to move to another residence. At the time, Guelph was slowly bringing kids into the residences one by one, but there's only a few hundred students on campus. Wasn't a lot.

Shawn Buckley

Liz, can I get you to stop looking at your notes. I know you're nervous, but—

Elizabeth Galvin

So she moved into East residence, which are townhouses that can house four kids. But it was just her and one other student in this residence at the time. So the campus is still really quiet and sort of dead. And the campus police were given the authority to give out tickets to students who were out of line. At the time, there were various rules, if you remember. All the different regions had different rules of gatherings: you could have five; you could have ten; you could be inside; you could be outside. So it's very confusing.

She turned 19 in January and celebrated her 19th birthday with one other kid. So two weeks later one of the rules changed; it did in our area, we could have five people. So they had a get-together, a party, as people do, with five students. The campus police gave them all COVID fines of \$880 each. Very stressful. They didn't know how they were going to pay this. So that— That was very, very stressful.

First year ends, they come home for the summer. She comes home for the summer, same job situation. So many things were closed. She couldn't get a very good job. She's working, you know, a minimum wage job again. And then the kids have to look for someone to room with in second year. The difficulty was, you know, over 4,000 kids are learning virtually, so it's hard to meet other people.

[00:15:00]

Most of these kids just had to answer an online ad, roll the dice and move in with somebody in September. Her friend that she was supposed to move in with hated University of Guelph so much that she quit and transferred to Windsor, where she could live at home. Because it was just so depressing there. And all the while, the media is bombarding us all with this— all these cases, everyone's sick. And just causing all this fear and stress and anxiety. And it just— It did not help her mental health, or the other two girls.

So September, second year. I'm almost done.

Shawn Buckley

September, what happens there? She moves in with somebody. She—

Elizabeth Galvin

In second year, she moves into a house with a family friend whose son was off-campus. He needed a room; he moves in there. And then two more people move in who are strangers. So not ideal. And then in-person classes resumed, sports resumed. Varsity sports started up again. But she wasn't the same. That last year and a half had taken such a toll on her mental health that, looking back now— I can see it did on me, too. I mean, I took a leave of absence from work, just from stress. And I was trying to find ways to help her because I didn't know what to do. I didn't get any guidance from these health professionals. But I can see now, looking back, she'd given up at that point.

So September, she's in school and classes are on. But we were always under the threat of, "It might close down again, it might close down, if the numbers go up." In December, we got vaccinated; we're fully vaccinated. Christmas was spent not with family because I caught Omicron. But my two daughters living in the same house didn't catch it and we were all fully vaccinated. I don't know, that's when I caught it. So we didn't see our family again. That was the third year in a row we didn't have Christmas with our family.

Shawn Buckley

Can I just stop you just so people understand. So Danielle came home for Christmas to be with the family, but because you had COVID, you guys couldn't spend Christmas with the family.

Elizabeth Galvin

Yeah. I mean, the media was—they'd say, the numbers were ramping up. And Omicron. And don't be around people. And so, to be safe, we didn't go and get together with our family.

Shawn Buckley

And were you guys able to be with family the year before at Christmas?

Elizabeth Galvin

No.

Shawn Buckley

So this is the second year in a row.

Elizabeth Galvin

It was actually the third year. But that's because one of my brothers-in-law was not well. And that's when the rumours of COVID were starting, in December 2019.

Shawn Buckley

So what happened in January then of 2022?

Elizabeth Galvin

Oh, January. The government locked us down again. And the University of Guelph followed suit right away. Even though these kids were all fully vaccinated, healthy, young people, they shut it down again. I wrote to everyone. I wrote to the Minister of Health; I wrote to the university; I wrote to my MPP; I wrote to many people. I wrote to the Provost, Charlotte Yates.

Shawn Buckley

I'm just going to stop you about that and tell us about— Just focus on Danielle, not what you did for the university. And I'm sorry, it's partly because we're out of time. But I also want you to focus on the story.

So in January basically, things are shut down again. And you're telling us: at the University of Guelph, you had to be fully vaccinated.

Elizabeth Galvin

Yeah. You had to be fully vaccinated to go to school that year, 2021-22. But they closed the campus down anyway and—

Shawn Buckley

How did Danielle respond to that?

Elizabeth Galvin

Well, she was isolated. They were isolated. They're in their rooms, in this house with three other students who were just as isolated. You could see them. They were so withdrawn. She just, you know— When you're alone in a room and you're by yourself, and it's— You have a lot of time to think.

[00:20:00]

It just would have been better if they had been on campus and doing things and being with other people. They needed it at that point. They're, you know— all of the kids.

On January 17th, while the students were learning virtually, the University of Guelph called a snow day and cancelled classes. A week later, they were still not allowed back in the classrooms. And that's when we lost Danielle.

Shawn Buckley

Now you've thought about this a lot. And we're trying to ask all witnesses how things could have been done differently. And I think you have a special insight into how young people were affected by this. So please tell us your thoughts on how you think things could have been done better or differently.

Elizabeth Galvin

Well, the stats that came out— Do you mean the stats that I found?

Shawn Buckley

You can tell me whatever you want about how you think things should be done differently.

Elizabeth Galvin

Well, as early as 2021, I read an article that anorexia cases had doubled. Suicidal thoughts had tripled. Forty per cent of parents observed a deterioration in their children's behavior and mood. Sixty per cent of parents met the criteria for depression themselves. Opioid deaths were up 80 per cent. And eating disorder program referrals were up 90 per cent from the year before.

Shawn Buckley

These types of things you were reading, did they match what you were seeing with Danielle and her friends?

Elizabeth Galvin

They did in my case. And then part of it is sort of looking back and just knowing that three young girls—two 20-year-olds and a 19-year-old—committed suicide in January. They were so distraught. They just couldn't go on any further. I mean, that's evidence that these lockdowns, they didn't work. They hurt people. And that can't happen again.

And yes, I have some recommendations that I'd like to make, if I could. Number one, I think the Canadian Media Fund needs to be abolished. I think that the media was not reporting—The way they reported the numbers weren't percentages of people or ages of people. It was just these numbers, these high numbers all the time. And it created a lot of fear and panic and anxiety.

Number two, family members must not be barred from entering a public hospital when their loved one is in a life-or-death situation, no matter what. A perfectly healthy person like me should not have been locked out of that hospital that day. I would have been able to talk to those professionals and gotten some advice on what to do. And if a person is deemed a danger to themselves by medical professionals in a hospital, they should not be released.

Number three, I think the federal government should come up with a Bill of Rights for Canadian students that guarantees a certain standard of education services that they are paying for. If they're not going to get what they're paying for, they should get some of their fees back.

Number four, unelected bureaucrats and local public health units should not be allowed to dictate everything that happens in our society without public input and debate. Businesses—and colleges and universities are considered businesses—must be allowed to make their own decisions.

Shawn Buckley

And Elizabeth, do you have just one more? Because we are so, so over time.

Elizabeth Galvin

I do. I just have one more. Young healthy people can't be shut out of schools as long as they were ever again. When it became evident that young people were not at great risk but they were suffering mentally—and then especially after they were vaccinated—they should have been allowed to go back to in-person learning.

It's proven that these lockdowns affected their mental health, social and educational development. And we're still feeling the effects today.

Shawn Buckley

Thank you. Commissioners, do you have any questions of Elizabeth?

Elizabeth, thank you for sharing your story. I know that took a lot of courage. And on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we thank you for your testimony.

Elizabeth Galvin

Thank you for having us.

[00:24:59]

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The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an “intelligent verbatim” transcription method.

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