

Hamilton Students on why they need a Living Wage

"As a student and one of the primary sources of income for a low-income family, I have seen the adverse effect of the current minimum wage. The minimum wage of \$14.00 an hour is nearly not enough to balance both academics and monthly bills to support an individual and, more importantly, a family financially. A living wage will allow more students to have the chance to gain work experience, fund their academic career and monthly expenses without having to choose between work and school. Some of the positive impacts of paying a living wage to students can increase productivity and increase employment in relation to decreasing students unemployment rate. As a student, I would greatly benefit from receiving a living wage to help my family and I financially."

~ Ayla Bahram, McMaster University Student, Ward 6

"Having a living wage means that I can work and save up on my earnings without fear of not paying off my school debt. The relationship between the cost of living and minimum wage are asymmetrical and its not fair that more money leaves my savings account than the amount that goes in. Being the eldest amongst 5 children as well as 1 out of 2 kids who are in post-secondary (the third eldest will attend university in a year), school fees do drain out both me and my parents earnings. Having a living wage will enable me to pay off accumulated tuition fees so that I don't have to ask my parents to use the money that was meant to pay off our houses' mortgage, groceries, or my baby brother's school trips."

- McMaster Student

"Student life, particularly for those in post-secondary programs, can be considerably costly. The cost of tuition keeps rising. The cost of rent continues to skyrocket. The cost of essentials such as textbooks, meals and hygiene can overwhelm students. As a high school student who will soon be entering post-secondary, these costs are very intimidating to me. Having a living wage would be essential for me in order to pursue a higher education and the extreme costs that come with it. Without a strong minimum wage, high school students, like myself, would have numerous opportunities closed to them. We need to ensure students earn a fair living wage so we can open up doors of opportunity."

- Aiden McIlvaney, McMaster Student, Ward 8

"Students need a living wage because the costs of living don't disappear when you're at school. The expenses can be huge: rent, food, textbooks, tuition, etc. These expenses—combined with low student wages—create barriers to accessing education"

- Former McMaster Student

“As a student, I am subjected to many fees and payments, including tuition, rent and basic living expenses. While OSAP does cover portions of the costs, a large amount of the money received is loans that must be paid back, resulting in an accumulation of debt upon terminating my time in post secondary schooling. A living wage is essential for students, who for the most part do not have a stable income, so that they may be able to pursue an education without being pushed into harsh financial situations.”

- Eshan Merali, McMaster Student, Ward 1

“Receiving a student wage of 10 dollars an hour at my first fast food job was undeniably absurd. With a 10 dollar wage I was not able to pay bills, spend money on myself, or even save for school. Why should students get paid less for the same job then people who are not in school. An increase in the student wage would help with not only saving for post secondary but give me the opportunity to have a stable income to pay for necessities like bills, food and Shelter.”

- Anthony R, Current high school Graduate

“ Minimum wage should be raised to \$16.45 as even surviving by making \$14 an hour is impossible, and constant struggle. Many students are not financially supported by their parents, family etc. Thus they have to pay for everything such as bills, rent, tuition etc from their own pockets. This is not enough to suffice all those funds and would relieve a lot of stress for students if the minimum wage was raised to \$16.45”

- Jasmit, McMaster Student.

“Currently the Ontario minimum wage is \$14 and for students like myself who come from large households with many siblings, much of the money goes towards helping to support the family. Raising the minimum wage from \$14.00 to \$16.45 will aid in relieving some of the financial burdens on many students and will allow them to focus on other areas including education”

- Dami, McMaster Student

“In a time when even those making 70-90k/yr struggle to feed their family, pay their children's tuition and live an average life, a minimum wage of \$14/hr will have detrimental effects on future generations to come”

- BG (prefers to remain anonymous)

“Currently the minimum wage is not enough to support basic living expenses. In the current economy, many students struggle to make ends meet working minimum wage. Where does this end” - S (prefers to remain anonymous)

“As a student, people might think one doesn't have many expenses, which is true to some younger students, however being in university paying multiple bills a month from my part time job that paid 14\$/ hour while studying to pursue higher education after my undergrad, making 2-3\$ more for each hour would have let me to start saving up earlier for my future and maybe have paid some of my tuition myself instead of graduating with a huge debt”

-Shahd, former McMaster Student.

“At the age of 16, I was enlisted to work at a law firm in Downtown Hamilton as a part of my high school's co-op program. I remember feeling engulfed with excitement since it had always been my career goal to be a lawyer. Thus, being given the opportunity to work at a distinguished firm and be exposed to the law firm environment brought my dreams to fruition. .After my co-op term was over, I was hired as a (very) junior legal assistant. Although I was being paid far below the minimum wage, my work was tedious and strenuous. My role involved filing large piles of papers, filing documentation at the courthouse (which would take hours), and personal errands such as bringing coffees and lunches to the office. The longer I worked there, the more tasks I was assigned, such as being the first one in the office to open it, and the last one there to close. To my dismay, my workload increased but my pay did not. My experience working at this law firm and being paid the student wage made me feel as though I had been taken advantage of. I believe the firm viewed themselves as doing me a service by helping an ambitious and naïve teenager; fulfilling her dream of working at a law firm. I did not mask my excitement and gratitude for the opportunity, and they took it as a green light to overwork and underpay me. The Labour Council's efforts to increase or abolish the student wage should certainly be taken into consideration since being a student does not evade you from financial responsibility, and it certainly does not evade one from dignity. Students' financial obligations must not be discounted due to their age or academic level. Rather they should be given an equal opportunity to be compensated for their work and efforts, like all other humans in the workforce.”

-A.N, Former McMaster Student

“Most of my coworkers at my previous job were high school students, University students, or individuals that didn't have the opportunity to pursue a specific career and are providing for their families. As a university student myself, I was earning \$14.00/hour. Meaning I would make somewhere between \$140-\$280 per week, with no specific hours guaranteed. In addition, I was studying full time, which takes about 65% of my time per week, leaving no capacity for another job. On the other hand, my tuition was approximately \$11,000 without books, supplies, etc. While my monthly expenses are between \$350-\$500, this results in a yearly required income of approximately \$16,000. While a part-time minimum wage job with 20 hours per week would

only provide approximately \$13,500. The minimum wage of \$14.00 tends to assume that those students working minimum-wage jobs have minimal expenses with their education or other basic requirements being paid by family members, or government aids. However, minimum wage is not a living wage which means it does not enable those with multiple struggles to pass by monthly without having to have debt. Most people tend to live paycheck to paycheck, while others have to use loans in order to live at the base line, or a combination of both situations.”

- Hala N. , McMaster Student.

“The reality is that many students are in circumstances where they must not only provide for themselves without assistance, but even take on debt trying to pursue their educations. Students need to be compensated fairly for the invaluable labour they provide with wages that meet their needs.”

- Justine Becker, McMaster Student, Ward 1

“As a student, I need a living wage so I can afford to support myself through an already costly program. As a student I am limited in how much I can work as I am a fulltime student. Working for less than a living wage will straddle me with life long debt.”

- Erik Jurriaans, McMaster Student, Ward 2

“We need to stop treating education like some personal self-improvement project and start treating it like the social good that it is. When people can access a good education, the entire community benefits. As a teaching assistant, I know many of my students are struggling just to make ends meet, and with stagnant wages and the ever-rising cost of living and tuition, students are falling farther and farther behind. No one should have to choose between pursuing an education and earning enough money to survive. Making the City of Hamilton a living wage employer for all workers, including students, would be a critical first step in realizing that future.”

- Chris Fairweather, McMaster Student, Ward 3

“Increasing student wages, whether seasonal or not, helps students in numerous ways. Many of us struggle with student loans/debt, rent, or school necessities (text books). Some of us have families that rely on us as well - we may be full time students for a short period of time but we are also full time caregivers in the same time. This increase will help students pay off their education all while helping them with other expenses - which is why it is needed.”

- Nadine Z. , McMaster Student

“Students are human too, they have a life that requires a living wage just like any other worker”

- Former McMaster Student

“Since the collapse of the manufacturing sector in Ontario, Hamilton stands out as being negatively impacted. We know from poverty reduction research that there has been little progress (if any) in rebuilding this heartland. Please consider the economics of providing Hamiltonians a living wage so that it can be reinvested in local businesses and support in returning Hamilton to the prosperous city it once was”

- A McMaster Student (and working mother)

“Canadians as a whole are struggling to meet their needs (close to 50% live paycheque-to-paycheque), and increasingly have to rely on going into debt to sustain themselves. This life-long battle often begins during post-secondary school, with the average student graduating with **\$30,000** in debt. But tuition is not a student's only concern, low wages and the rising cost of living adds further strain to our lives, often resulting in more debt. A quarter of all Canadian students are unable to pay their credit cards off monthly, and those who graduate with credit card debt have an average of **\$2,224**. A living wage would go a long way to help students avoid life-long debt, but also ensure that we can meet our basic needs and do not need to survive off of \$1 packages of noodles.”

- Anonymous McMaster Student

“As a Hamilton resident, I fully support a living wage for student workers. No City of Hamilton employee should be struggling to pay their bills, but high rent prices, tuition fees, and living expenses leave students vulnerable to poverty. A living wage will ensure students have the resources to succeed in their studies and build a future our city can be proud of.”

-Clare, McMaster student, Ward 1

“I believe Hamilton should adopt a living wage because every worker, student or otherwise, should be able to live comfortably in our city without the common fears of eviction or food insecurity.”

- Vincent Barzetti, McMaster student, Ward 5

"I support the increase in student wages because there is a difference between a living wage and a thriving wage. Currently, students are not even being paid a living wage. Their talent, skills, and hard work are exploited by companies because they know students need work experiences. This allows them to compensate students less than their worth. This should change."

- Devika Nair, McMaster University Undergraduate

"I support the motion to increase Hamilton student wages because it would allow me to stay in Hamilton and pursue higher education here. The cost of living is too high and students should be able to access the community resources they need without worrying about money"

- Arjun Nair, McMaster University Undergraduate

"I'm a fourth-year graduate student who receives a stipend that covers my living costs, my food costs, and my transportation cost. I spend over 70 hours per week on my studies. While my friends are buying houses and cars, my bank account has not changed in the past 4 years. I owe the government \$50,000 for my undergraduate education. Increasing student wages would give me the opportunity to start my life after graduate school without feeling trapped by the opportunity cost".

- Anonymous, McMaster University Graduate

“A living wage for students is something that needs to be implemented sooner than later. On a personal level I had to pay tuition, book fees, gas for commuting to class and everything in between on my own. In order to pay for all these mandatory fees by myself means I had to work a minimum of 20-30 hours a week while being a full time student and taking advantage of OSAP loans. That itself causes a huge amount of stress and anxiety. On top of that lots of people struggle with time management and making sure they have a balanced work-life-school schedule. This is nearly impossible to do when you have a full school schedule, and then are rushing to get to work right after. Oftentimes this only allows for a quick lunch break during the day and as soon as our work shifts are over it means we now have to do homework. Homework itself can range anywhere from 1-6 hours a night depending on course load and assigned work.

Now being a recent graduate from Sheridan College, I am living on my own fully independently and it is near impossible to pay rent, groceries, other bills and necessary costs in order to just live. I strongly believe that we need to be paying students a livable wage in order to live. Especially with the hardships which are currently Covid-19 only makes finding a better paying job near impossible. I believe we need to make a difference now instead of facing the possible repercussions later.”

Sincerely,

- Cassandra A.

"Students deserve a higher livable wage. "Student" does not always mean young adult. It was reported in 2019 that almost 129,000 students were over the age of 30 in Ontario and that number is rising each year. Many of these students likely already have families. If the jobs we are offering these mature students can't even offer them a living wage for them and their families, then we are failing them"

- Lindsay McNabb, McMaster University Undergraduate