



February 3, 2023

To: Members of Hamilton City Council

Re: Motion to provide a living wage for full-time student and seasonal employees

On behalf of the McMaster Students Union, we ask that Hamilton City Council accept this letter in support of the motion to implement a living wage for all full-time summer students and full-time seasonal employees. The MSU believes that implementing a living wage for full-time employment is necessary to adequately support people not only in their pursuit of a post-secondary degree, but also to tackle the mental and physical health challenges faced by those living below the poverty line.

Student staff members working full-time for the City in a seasonal or temporary capacity face the same cost pressures of rent, food, energy, and other essentials as any other City employee. But affordability is an even larger concern for post-secondary students, as students have only a short time to work 35+ hours a week to save for tuition and academic expenses - in addition to basic necessities - for the other eight months of the year. This fact is further exacerbated by the housing crisis and rent inflation that persist in our city. Students are reporting rent increases above 20% in some cases, along with a shortage of available rental units, which further limits supply and drives up living costs.

Previous Councillors have repeatedly told students of Hamilton's three post-secondary institutions that the retention of graduates from McMaster, Mohawk, and Redeemer was a priority for the City. Those words seem hallow when PSE students continue to be the lowest paid full-time staff, and therefore have the hardest time living in the city year-round. If Hamilton truly wants to prioritize graduate retention, it should facilitate a wage structure that demonstrates fairness and equality amongst full-time employees, rather than relegating 'student' full-time staff to less than a living wage.

Summer student employees are residents, active citizens, and future Hamilton leaders. We are asking the City to support full-time student employment and demonstrate a commitment to combatting poverty by offering post-secondary students a rightly deserved living wage. The MSU does believe that the City should pay students a living wage because it is the right thing to do. Simultaneously, we hope the City sets an example for other organizations to follow. We should all be working towards a city and a society where people earn a living wage and can afford basic necessities. Students must be included in that progress. We hope Council will take this into consideration, approve this motion, and stand in support of full-time student and seasonal employees.

Sincerely,

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