



**Public Service Alliance of Canada Local 901**

The Union of Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, Postdoctoral Scholars, and Research Assistants at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario

[www.psa901.org](http://www.psa901.org)

Friday, March 27 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Queen's University Responds - Spring/Summer Graduate Student Tuition Suspension Petition

On Monday, March 23, 2020, PSAC Local 901 created and circulated a letter campaign requesting that Queen's University suspend Spring/Summer 2020 graduate student tuition. As of Friday, March 27, more than 800 letters in support have been mailed to Provost and Vice-Principal Academic Mark F. Green. The campaign has been shared by Kingston local news, Queen's University students, staff, faculty, and Kingston community members. Despite living through a global pandemic, we have found community in the sharing and distribution of a common goal, desire, and need. We invite community members and local media sources to continue to share this timely and well supported campaign.

Today, graduate students across campus received an email response to our petition from Mark Green stating that "Even though we appreciate the difficult circumstances you are facing, Queen's, like many Canadian universities, is not in a position to waive graduate tuition for the summer term at this time."

This response to the widespread campaign and the popular voice it represents, is disappointing and disheartening to our members who are financially insecure at this time.

Graduate students at Queen's University face unique challenges. In response to COVID-19, Queen's University has suspended access to physical spaces such as libraries, student offices, and buildings. Students who require fieldwork as part of their degree requirements are unable to continue their research due to University Research Ethics policies. By not completing fieldwork, students are required to rethink their proposed research project, make amendments, and delay their completion. Other students have been instructed to leave their labs. What this means is, students cannot complete their research in a timely manner, they are not receiving access to the facilities they are paying summer tuition to use and may delay their degree completion. Students whose degree completion is delayed will continue to pay tuition for any additional semester they are registered in, to finish their degree. Students have limited access to wellness services such as the Athletic and Recreation Centre (ARC), Campus Dentist, and are having remote phone meetings with campus physicians. PSAC Local 901 supports the University's decision to suspend these services. We recognize these closures as imperative to our health and safety as workers and students. However, despite the University's attempt at supporting students in their best capacity through off campus and digital means, students are struggling with the inability to be in these spaces. Mental and physical exhaustion, loneliness, and expectations of productivity are negatively affecting our ability to work. Paying tuition is another stress added to our already precarious conditions. It is insufficient that the University claims that they are providing services, when we know they are not at their full capacities. Asking to suspend tuition is not a way of graduate students expecting a vacation or to stop working over the summer. It is a means of acknowledging the added and unprecedented stress and hardship this pandemic has placed on us.

The campaign was not designed to negatively impact University budgets or policies. Students across Universities in Ontario, such as Carleton University and Western University, are demanding that administrators acknowledge our inability to work at full capacity. Graduate students across Ontario campuses are also sharing their support in suspending summer tuition. The campaign asks that Queen's University consider the financial, social, childcare, and mental health related implications of COVID-19 on

graduate students at this time. International students at Queen's University are especially precarious. Many are unable to travel to their homes or work because of limited visas.

PSAC Local 901 believes that the cost of tuition could be better utilized to support the payment of rent, childcare, food, and lack of income. The stress of this situation on graduate students is evident and will not be diminished by the insufficient response circulated by Mark Green.

In the words of Mark Green, this is an unprecedented situation. Queen's University has never encountered such an extraordinary predicament. That is why we are asking for compassion and understanding during this time.

Green wrote, "the university's top priority will continue to be the health and well-being of the Queen's community".

We ask that the University demonstrates this promise to students by suspending Spring/Summer tuition for 2020. Graduate students at Queen's University have always contributed to the finances of the University. We are asking that the University give back in this incredibly trying time.

As a local representing almost to 1800 Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, and Research Assistants, we stand by our members and support their solidarity initiatives moving forward. We strongly encourage the University to reconsider their position.

For more information visit [www.pfac901.org](http://www.pfac901.org).

For interviews or comments please email Stéphanie McKnight, President of PSAC Local 901 at [president@pfac901.org](mailto:president@pfac901.org).