

PSAC 901

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Local 901
138 Union Street
Robert Sutherland Hall, Room 547
Kingston, ON K7L 2P1

November 29, 2023

Stephen JR Smith
Executive Chairman and Co-Founder
First National Financial LP
16 York Street, Suite 1900
Toronto, ON M5J 0E6

To Mr. Stephen JR Smith,

We trust this letter finds you in good health and spirits. We are writing to you on behalf of over 2,000 graduate student employees at Queen's University who serve as Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Teaching Fellows, and Postdoctoral Scholars.

Graduate student employees play a vital role in shaping the academic experience at Queen's, taking on responsibilities such as teaching, grading, and guiding students through their undergraduate educational journey and into the careers they realize in adulthood. But primarily, we undertake cutting-edge research which underscores the significant impact Queen's University has on the world. Nonetheless, we also find ourselves grappling with concerns about our next meal, or whether our families will have a roof over their heads.

In response to the pressing issue of food insecurity among graduate student employees at Queen's University, we initiated an Emergency Food Support Fund in January 2023. From its launch until the fund's closure on November 24, 2023, the program received over 1,500 applications and supported more than 800 individuals and households with dependents with grocery gift cards, amounting to an allocation exceeding \$80,000. In the Winter term of 2023, there were 447 applications for emergency support. **More than 30% (140) were from graduate students employed in what is now Smith Engineering.**

Your donation was excitedly announced to our members as the meeting of momentum and magnitude. We believe that momentum would actually meet magnitude if no graduate student

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employee needed to apply for emergency food support programs, or go to foodbanks run by their employer, as Queen's University often urges us to do. We find it challenging to share in the excitement while we are aware that graduate student employees, including many in Smith Engineering, are living well below the poverty line.

We were moved by your recent generous donation to Queen's University. Research funding is important, and it is just as essential to acknowledge that any academic endeavor's success ultimately relies on the well-being of the people behind it. We are asking you to extend your generosity directly to graduate student employees, who make Queen's the unforgettable and transformative experience that prompted your return. To revive the Emergency Food Support Fund, we are seeking a contribution of \$500,000.

Your investment can help shape the narrative of Queen's University, graduate student employees, and higher education in Ontario and beyond. We cannot simply take on more loans or additional jobs and simultaneously continue to produce research which furthers Queen's excellence as well as our own communities' well-being — the pursuit which led us to pursue graduate education in the first place.

Of course, beyond individual philanthropy, sustained support for education requires broader systemic change. There must be an immediate and sustained increase in public funding for higher education to ensure that education remains a right rather than a commodity for the privileged. Therefore, we are asking you to leverage your considerable influence and standing in the Canadian post-secondary sector to champion sustained systemic change in the funding landscape of higher education. Your involvement would be invaluable in creating a lasting impact, alleviating the need for repeated requests for financial support in the future and ensuring Queen's University continues to live up to the excellence associated with the Smith name.

In closing, we look forward to your response to our request to revive the Emergency Food Support Fund, and we urge you to utilize your influential platform to advocate for sustained funding in higher education to help ensure graduate student employees do not continue to experience widespread poverty and food insecurity. Our aspiration is that through your generous contribution and advocacy, we can secure a future where the graduate student employees at Queen's University do not have to appeal for charity.

Sincerely,

PSAC 901 Executive Committee
<https://psac901.org>