

PSAC 901

Graduate student employees facing rising food insecurity are appalled by the profound lack of concern demonstrated by Queen's University

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 11, 2024: Regrettably, PSAC 901's appeal urging Queen's University benefactor Stephen JR Smith to assist graduate student staff members who are experiencing food insecurity remains unanswered. On November 30, 2023, the PSAC 901 Executive Committee, driven by despair, [wrote an open letter to Smith](#) asking for \$500,000 to revive the local's Emergency Food Support Fund, which was closed on November 24, 2023.

From its inception in January 2023 until its closure, the Emergency Food Support Fund processed over 1,500 applications, aiding over 800 graduate student employees at Queen's University and households with dependents through grocery gift cards, totaling an allocation exceeding \$80,000. [As consistently highlighted by PSAC 901](#), food insecurity among graduate student employees at Queen's remains shockingly high, as evidenced by the overwhelming demand for support and the [abrupt shutdown of the SGPS Food Insecurity Relief Program](#) within 24 hours.

As a labour union representing more than 2,000 graduate student employees at Queen's University, PSAC 901 took exceptional action to secure immediate food stability for its members, endeavouring to counterbalance Queen's University's inadequate wages and funding packages. Insufficient funding leading to hardship and stress—most notably, a lack of access to nutritional food that is culturally and socially appropriate—impedes our ability to deliver exceptional research and teaching. [The recent decline in rankings](#) echoes our worry that Queen's is steering itself toward failure by failing to support its students and employees.

In writing to Smith, we hoped to bring awareness to this dire situation among the university's senior leadership and donors, urging them to adhere to Queen's professed values of [empathy, compassion, and respect](#). We were met with resounding silence, indicating a profound lack of empathy, compassion, and respect for graduate student staff members who fundamentally support Queen's as an educational and research institution.

Even though we are essential to the successful delivery of [Queen's teaching and research missions](#), Provost Matthew Evans and Faculty of Arts and Science Dean Barbara Crow attempted to deny our participation in the [December 11, 2023, Faculty and Staff Town Hall](#) discussing [austerity measures](#) that will greatly impact PSAC 901 members. We are appalled that our employee status would be challenged when our collective agreement explicitly defines us as employees at Queen's University. After witnessing Evans and Crow's vague, empty responses to numerous inquiries regarding the values guiding Queen's University, including the recent \$100

million donation from Smith, we understand that empathy, compassion, and respect are not values upheld by Queen's leadership.

PSAC 901 acknowledges that individual donations alone cannot remedy the predicament of food insecurity and other challenges. Nonetheless, food insecurity is not an accidental occurrence; it is a foreseeable, engineered outcome of underfunding. Queen's University excels in fiscal management when it wants to extract revenue, as evidenced by its recent [announcement of a 10.5% rent increase for Queen's Community Housing tenants](#), who are primarily graduate students, while funding packages remain stable and the cost of living rises.

We urge Queen's University to show equal concern for their students, staff, and tenants as they do for their financial records. We are weary of hearing the budget deficit cited as the rationale for the university's inaction. In the years preceding this crisis, [Queen's accumulated over \\$600 million in surpluses](#). It was a conscious decision by the senior leadership not to invest in students and employees. Queen's also chose to lobby the Ford government to end the provincial tuition freeze instead of advocating for better funding for higher education as a solution to the problem.

PSAC 901 stands united with every [campus group demanding accountability for this food insecurity crisis](#) and opposes [the austerity measures proposed by Provost Evans and Dean Crow](#). We reject [assertions made by Provost Evans](#) that some academic faculties are more valuable or deserving of funding based on their ability to secure private financial donors. We encourage Stephen JR Smith to act however he sees fit in light of Queen's crumbling reputation and demonstrated disregard for not only its graduate student employees but also other staff, undergraduate students, faculty members, and instructors, including adjunct professors and non-unionized graduate students. We hope that with Smith's influence, Queen's University leadership may begin to heed growing calls to foster empathy, compassion, and respect for all members of its community.

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