Consultation Plan and Solidarity Motion: #DontForgetStudents
April 16, 2020

Background

We are in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Government of Canada has taken measures to compensate those who have lost income during this period, including creating the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and making changes to the Canada Summer Jobs Program. These adjustments, however, do not offer avenues of compensation to many students and recent graduates.

In analysis published on April 2, 2020, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives demonstrated that a third of unemployed Canadians, or 862 000 people, will receive nothing from either EI or CERB.¹ In response to this gap, a grassroots coalition of postsecondary students and recent graduates organized the #DontForgetStudents campaign and published a petition to the federal government on Change.org on April 3, 2020 calling on the Government to expand income support to meet their needs (Appendix A). On April 7, the group released a press release stating that over 10 000 signatures had been added to the petition within its first four days (Appendix B). As of April 16, the number of signatures has reached 39 505. Don’t Forget Students has continued to post updates regarding the petition and adjustments to CERB via their twitter page @dontforgetstdns.

A number of prominent student organizations have endorsed the #DontForgetStudents campaign. On April 15, 2020, Don’t Forget Students published a letter jointly authored with the Canadian Federation of Students and over 25 individual student unions from across Canada (Appendix C).

The petition and the open letter were brought to the attention of the executive on Wednesday, April 15, and executives agreed that the spirit of this letter was in line with the Union’s general principles of advocating for students’ rights and well-being.

Motion to Be Served to Council

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has led to students across Canada losing work, income, and summer job opportunities, and the Government of Canada has responded with the creation of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and an expansion of the Canada Summer Jobs Program (CSJ); and

WHEREAS the current terms for the CERB do not cover students and recent graduates who have not lost a job due to COVID-19 but who may be facing financial hardships nonetheless due to cancelled internships, fewer summer work opportunities, or the tough labour market; and

WHEREAS the Dalhousie Student Union represents Dalhousie students, many of whom are facing these challenges; and

WHEREAS on April 3, a grassroots coalition of students and recent graduates initiated the #DontForgetStudents campaign and posted a petition on Change.org calling on the Government of Canada to “provide income support to cover all students and recent graduates, regardless of prior work experience and income” which, as of April 16, is approaching 40 000 signatures; and

WHEREAS on April 15, Don’t Forget Students published an open letter jointly authored by their organization, the Canadian Federation of Students, and over 25 other student unions across Canada, calling on Justin Trudeau to implement the demand of the Don’t Forget Students petition; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the DSU advocate for the full coverage of students and recent graduates under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit by signing the petition initiated by Don’t Forget Students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the DSU endorse the “Letter to Justin Trudeau re” Students Need CERB” authored by a coalition of student organizations, and investigate becoming an official signatory to the letter; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT individual DSU councillors, offices, and societies be encouraged to sign on to said petition and/or pass similar motions of solidarity and support; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the DSU share the open letter and the petition on social media and encourage members to sign on as well; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the DSU continue to research ways to advocate for better student supports during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Consultation Plan

The following is a plan for how stakeholders will be consulted on signing this open letter and petition, in accordance with the Consultation Policy. All quotes are excerpts drawn from said policy.

Relevance To Consultation Policy

“1.1 Prior to the submission of a proposal to Council, consultation will be undertaken in respect to:

1.1.4 When there is a desire for the DSU to state support or disapproval in respect to a specific situation.”

The desire for the DSU to sign this open letter falls under 1.1.4, as it is a desire for the DSU to state support for the CERB being expanded to include students and recent graduates.

Strict Time Constraint

“1.2.6 Where a proposal is under a strict time constraint and a full consultation process cannot happen before a decision is needed, the Councillor or Executive Officer will email any Council Representatives and Societies which would be considered a stakeholder. This e-mail shall:

1.2.6.1 Contain a full explanation of what is being proposed with any supporting information providing context;
1.2.6.2 Be sent no later than 24hrs prior to its submission to Council for debate;
1.2.6.3 State what steps will be taken to more thoroughly consult with the stakeholder after the submission of the proposal;
1.2.6.4 Provide the date, time and location of the Council meeting at which it is to be debated.”

This proposal meets the requirements for “strict time constraint” as the COVID-19 situation is developing daily, and Council’s last meeting of the academic year is on April 22. The petition emphasizes that “[m]any [students] have expenses due now, and will have no source of income because of the crisis.”

As such, the first step will be to circulate this document, along with the petition and open letter, to Councillors via email. Because this issue will be of interest and importance to all students, the email will be circulated to all councillors. All councillors will be encouraged to provide input into the proposal, and to circulate to their constituents for review and feedback.

Plan for Further Consultation Prior to and Following Council Decision
In accordance with the consultation policy cited above, this plan shall be included in the email specified under 1.2.6.

The policy outlines the following steps for consultation:

1.2.1 Determine what stakeholder the proposal is in respect to, either in representing their voice and/or the impacts it could have on them.

The membership as a whole has been identified as the key stakeholder for this proposal. In addition to councillors, this proposal will be emailed to faculty level-societies. All councillors and societies will be asked to solicit feedback and input from their respective constituents or members.

Councillors are invited to suggest further specific stakeholders.

1.2.2 Provide the identified stakeholder an opportunity to give thoughtful consideration to pertinent issues, consult their members and tender their opinions and advice.

1.2.3 The stakeholder must be provided with the same information from which the proposal is being derived so as to foster informed comments.

1.2.4 Proposals taken to Council shall note which stakeholder has been consulted with and their support or disapproval of the proposal.

Given the issues outlines under “strict time constraint,” the proposal will be brought to Council for debate on April 22nd. However, if significant negative feedback on the proposal is received from Councillors or stakeholders prior to said council meeting, a motion shall be put forward for the proposal motion to be struck from the agenda.

All support and/or disapproval received up to the meeting of Council will be reported to Council during motivation for the motion.

3.2 In attempting to identify which consultation tools to use and how to apply them, the Councillor or Executive Officer should discuss options with the Communications and Outreach Coordinator.

The executive will consult with the Communications and Outreach Coordinator about options for further consultation.
APPENDIX A: Text of the petition published on Change.org by #DontForgetStudents

#DontForgetStudents | #N'OubliezPaslesÉtudiants started this petition to Government of Canada

The federal government has responded to the COVID-19 crisis with an unprecedented series of measures to protect Canadians who have lost their income due to the economic impact of the virus. We welcome the measures the government has already taken to ensure that Prime Minister Trudeau’s ambition that “no-one gets left behind” becomes a reality. Despite the substantial relief programs that the government has quickly assembled to make sure that no Canadian falls through the cracks, many vulnerable groups are at risk of being left behind because they do not qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

Students and recent graduates who have not lost a job as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak do not currently qualify for the CERB. This includes students and recent graduates who cannot find work, have had start dates delayed, and/or internships and summer jobs cancelled entirely.

Most don’t qualify for Employment Insurance, as EI requires one to have worked a minimum of 420 hours in the last year. Furthermore, the 6-month moratorium on Canada Student Loans repayment doesn’t help current students and the class of 2020, who will already receive a 6 month interest-free grace period upon graduation.

Students and recent graduates who are just starting their lives and careers now face the most uncertain job market since the Great Depression. Students need to pay for tuition, books, and other living expenses so that they can invest in their futures. Many have expenses due now, and will have no source of income because of the crisis.

We implore the Government of Canada to provide income support to cover all students and recent graduates, regardless of prior work experience and income. In particular, the $5000 per year income threshold that is currently attached to the CERB will leave behind many students and recent graduates who were unable to work in the last year because they were pursuing their studies.

It is not too late for our government to act to ensure that students and graduates receive the help they need.

APPENDIX B: Press Release by Don’t Forget Students, published on April 7, 2020

Tuesday, 7 April, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Over 10,000 Canadians Support Expansion of CERB to Students and Recent Graduates

Countless students, recent grads excluded from CERB eligibility despite facing an urgent need for financial support

An online petition to expand the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to include students and recent graduates regardless of whether they earned $5,000 of income last year has amassed over 10,000 signatures, as of Monday, 6 April. Don’t Forget Students - N’oubliez pas les étudiants, a coalition of postsecondary students and recent graduates, launched the petition on Friday, 3 April in response to the gaps in federal financial relief measures pertaining to the COVID-19 crisis. Within hours of its launch, the campaign was already trending on Twitter across Canada.

“In just four short days, 10,000 Canadians have joined us in fighting to ensure that income support through the CERB is extended to students and recent graduates,” said Nicholas Ferreira, a founding member of the campaign. “The message from Canada’s students and recent grads is clear. The federal government must act immediately to ensure that students and recent grads can keep a roof over their heads and put food on their plates.”

Don’t Forget Students is advocating for the federal government to expand the CERB benefit to all students, regardless of prior income, who cannot find work, have had start dates delayed, and/or internships and summer jobs cancelled entirely. Many students rely on summer jobs and internships to pay for tuition and living expenses, and in many cases, to fulfill graduation requirements. However, the CERB currently applies only to students and recent graduates who made $5,000 within the last twelve months or in 2019, and those who qualify for Employment Insurance (EI). According to the petition, most students are ineligible for EI, as it requires one to have worked a minimum of 420 hours in the last year. Whilst the government has implemented a six-month moratorium on Canada Student Loans payments, this does not help current students and the class of 2020, who were already eligible for a six-month interest-free grace period after graduation.

The campaign is also seeking to expand the benefit to recent graduates who made less than $5,000 last year due to academic responsibilities. Many of these graduates were seeking employment when the COVID-19 crisis hit, and now face an impossible job market in a rapidly deteriorating economy.

Beyond receiving over 10,000 signatures, the campaign has seen public support from members of parliament across party lines, including Heather McPherson of the New Democratic Party and John Brassard of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a press conference on Sunday, 5 April that the government “should have more to say in the coming days” about helping postsecondary students, according to the Globe and Mail.

“Politicians have started to express their support for our campaign, but targeted measures have yet to be announced,” added Ferreira. “Students and recent grads can’t afford to wait any longer for emergency relief, since April rent was due six days ago and bills are piling up. With Canadian students suffering more with each passing day, our singular focus is ensuring that students and recent graduates have the financial support they need to survive.”

For media inquiries, contact: Nicholas Ferreira, (905) 716-7802 or nicholas.ac.ferreira@gmail.com

Source: https://twitter.com/dontforgetstdns/status/1247509431484436483
Appendix C: Open letter jointly authored by Don’t Forget Students, Canadian Federation of Students, and student unions across Canada

Letter to Justin Trudeau re: Students Need CERB
Apr 15, 2020

The Right Honourable Prime Minister
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Trudeau,

We, the undersigned, are a grouping of student organizations and coalitions calling on the federal government to extend the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to all students and recent graduates, regardless of employment status and previous income.

Students and recent graduates who are just starting their careers now face the most uncertain job market since the Great Depression. The devastating economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are being felt across the country. While the government’s focus has understandably been on ensuring that those who lost their livelihoods in the last few weeks have the support they need to keep a roof over their heads and put food on the table; students and recent graduates also find themselves in an extremely precarious financial situation.

Because of skyrocketing tuition fees and the rise of the cost of living, the more than 2 million students in Canada were already in a dire financial situation. The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated this. On top of tuition fees, students also need to pay for rent, groceries and other necessities, for which they usually rely on summer employment. With non-essential businesses across the country shutting down to fight the virus, we hear from students every day who tell us they have lost their jobs, summer internships and employment offers. In addition, graduating students are entering a job market where 4.5 million people have already been laid off.

Your government has told students that you have heard our pleas, that you are listening, and that more help is on the way. On Wednesday, April 8th, you announced the expansion of the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program. While a welcome first step to address the financial uncertainty students and recent graduates are facing, your government estimates the CSJ will only create 70,000 jobs. Yet, there are millions of students and recent graduates in Canada who have lost their income or employment opportunities. Furthermore, not all students are eligible for the CSJ due to eligibility restrictions, most notably students over 30 and international students.
By introducing CERB, the government has acknowledged that subsidizing employment alone will not meaningfully mitigate the devastation that this economic crisis is causing workers and businesses across Canada. It is clear that students and recent graduates are also in need of income support right now. We continue to believe that the only way to ensure that no one is left behind during the COVID-19 pandemic is by making all students and recent graduates eligible for the CERB. We, the undersigned, readily anticipate the introduction of this measure.

Sincerely,

Don’t Forget Students
Canadian Federation of Students
Carleton University Graduate Students’ Association
Carleton University Student Association
University of Windsor Graduate Student Society
University of Windsor Students’ Alliance
York University Graduate Students’ Association
Brandon University Students’ Union
L’Association générale des étudiants de l’Université Sainte-Anne
University of New Brunswick Graduate Students’ Association
The University of Guelph’s Graduate Student Association Executive
Nipissing University Student Union
Lakehead University Student Union
Algoma University Students’ Union
Grenfell Campus Student Union
Alma Mater Society of Queen’s University
University of Guelph Central Students’ Association
Brock University Graduate Students’ Association
Laurentian University Graduate Students’ Association
Student Union of NSCAD University
McMaster Students Union
University of Toronto Mississauga Students’ Union
Continuing Education Students’ Association of Ryerson
York Federation of Students
Trent Central Student Association
Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students at the University of Toronto
University of Toronto Students’ Union
Memorial University of Newfoundland Students’ Union
Graduate Students’ Union of the Memorial University of Newfoundland

Source: https://cfs-fcee.ca/letter-to-justin-trudeau-re-students-need-cerb/