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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Dalhousie Student Union calls for fairness for students on social assistance**

HALIFAX-The Dalhousie Student Union is calling on the provincial government to stop discriminating against students in the social assistance program after a Dalhousie student in the Transition Year Program was cut off of social assistance this semester.

“With tuition fees increasing year over year, it is becoming increasingly difficult for low income people to access university and get out of poverty,” said John Hutton, Vice-President Academic and External of the Dalhousie Student Union. “Forcing people on social assistance through a bureaucratic labyrinth on top of navigating thorough university admissions processes is unjust and unfair.”

Currently, anyone on social assistance seeking to attend a post-secondary education program longer than two years must apply for the CareerSeek program. Under CareerSeek, an individual must meet several rigid application criteria, including proving they are unable to otherwise find work and demonstrating the means to pay all costs related to tuition, textbooks, student fees, child care, and transportation for the duration of the program through approved loans or other means.

“I feel like the government is trying to discourage me from getting an education,” said Lori Anne Willis, a student in the Transition Year Program at Dalhousie who was cut off of social assistance by the Department of Community Service. “I’m trying to increase my independence so I can get off assistance. It doesn’t make any sense.”

Prior to 2000, students were permitted to receive social assistance while enrolled in post-secondary education. When this policy changed in 2000, 1,600 students were receiving social assistance.

“Minister of Community Services Joanne Bernard was one of the thousands of Nova Scotians who were able to access post-secondary education while receiving social assistance,” said Michael Davies-Cole, Black Student Representative for the Dalhousie Student Union. “All we are asking is that students have access to the same programs the Minister benefitted from.”

Repealing regulation 67 of the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act would allow students in need to access social assistance.

“The government should be supporting people in getting an education,” said Willis. “That benefits everyone: we can get jobs, pay taxes and contribute to the system that supported us.”

The Dalhousie Student Union is the province’s largest student union, representing over 18,500 undergraduate and graduate students at all campuses of Dalhousie University.

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For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact Emily Davidson at 902-494-7193 or 902-422-1405 or dsu.graphicdesign@dal.ca