

January 8th, 2013

RE: Ineligibility of Low-Income Graduate Students for Childcare Subsidy

Dear Mayor of Ottawa and City Councillors,

As representatives of nearly 10,000 graduate students in the City of Ottawa, the Graduate Student Association of the University of Ottawa (GSAED) and the Carleton University Graduate Students' Association were shocked to recently learn that the City has removed the childcare subsidy for low-income graduate students.

City of Ottawa policy CCSU 4.9 reads:

A parent who demonstrates progression through a full time academic, language or training program excluding Master's and Doctorate level programs meets the criteria for a recognized need for child care fee subsidy.

This policy change occurred with no consultation and appears to represent either a deeply misinformed vision of the needs of graduate student parents and legal guardians or a punitive approach to parents and legal guardians who seek to improve themselves and the lives of their children by pursuing further education. Not only does this policy change eliminate the possibility of affordable and quality childcare but it also impacts the accessibility of post-secondary education.

From a long-term financial perspective, this decision does not make sense. Research conducted by the Centre for the Developing Child at Harvard University has shown that between \$4 and \$9 is returned to the economy for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, including childcare.

The decision to block low-income graduate student parents from accessing childcare subsidies is not in the spirit of policies adopted by City Council. For example, in 2002 City Council adopted an Equity and Diversity Policy. The policy seeks to,

establish a framework that requires all departments within the City to embrace the spirit of equity and diversity in the development of their policies and programs that impact the delivery of City services, the use of City facilities, grants to external agencies and other outwardly focused activities.

It is clear that a policy decision that excludes parents and legal guardians from the childcare subsidy based on their pursuit of higher education is far removed from a "spirit

of equity and diversity.”

GSAED and the GSA advocate for universally accessible, high quality, not-for-profit education and childcare. Students face mounting financial barriers such as the rising cost of tuition fees (students in Ontario pay the highest tuition fees in the country), the rising cost of living, and overwhelming debt. As we know from working with our campus food banks, many students live in poverty and are accessing the services of food banks in growing numbers. These service users are often students with dependents.

No rationale has been given for restricting graduate students from the childcare subsidy. From a policy perspective, penalizing low-income parents who pursue an education is wrongheaded in every way imaginable.

We request that the City revoke this policy and reinstate childcare subsidies for graduate students. Representatives from both GSAED and GSA would like to meet with Mayor Watson at his earliest convenience to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,



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