



For Immediate Release:

Students, staff, faculty call on publicly-funded colleges and universities to distance themselves from Ontario Chamber of Commerce campaign

**ONTARIO, November 15, 2017** -- Today, students, staff and faculty on campuses across Ontario will be kicking off a campaign to demand that university and college presidents distance their institutions from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Colleges Ontario and the Council of Ontario Universities are both members of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and many institutions are part of locally-based Chambers. The full text of the letter is available here: [FairnessNOW.ca](http://FairnessNOW.ca).

"I was surprised to learn that York University is implicated in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce campaign against the \$15 minimum wage, equal pay, greater union rights, fairer scheduling and more," said Alia Karim, campaigns coordinator for the Graduate Students' Association at York University (YUGSA), referring to the Chamber's 'Keep Ontario Working' campaign. "The campaign implies that fair wages and working conditions will put people out of work – but the latest academic research does not support this claim. York University should not legitimize this kind of fear-mongering, especially since it is contrary to the interests of students, staff, faculty and the broader community. That's why we are calling on our university to explicitly distance itself from the Chamber of Commerce and to support the campaign for a \$15 minimum wage and fairer labour laws for all."

Humber College student Paula Greenberg will be rallying in support of Ontario college faculty on November 15. She sees a connection between the College Employer Council's refusal to provide equal pay and benefits for part-time college faculty and its involvement with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce campaign that would deny a \$15 minimum wage and decent work for everyone. "I'm not just a student, I'm a worker too. I've been in minimum wage jobs and struggled to make ends meet while saving for school. We all need to stand together to say enough is enough. Our publicly-funded colleges should not be campaigning against our interests whether we are students, staff or faculty."

"History shows that big business has opposed every change in labour laws that benefit workers. Even the phrase 'too much, too soon' was recycled from 1963 when the Canadian Restaurant Association opposed a general minimum wage," says Frankie Cachon, a contract professor at the University of Windsor. She supports the Fight for \$15 and Fairness and agrees that publicly-funded institutions should not be participating in political campaigns that run contrary to the public interest. "The fact that universities and colleges are increasing their reliance on precarious, part-time faculty while allowing the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to speak on their behalf against equitable labour laws, should be a real concern for all Ontarians."

"The vast majority of Ontarians support a minimum wage of at least \$15 and better working conditions for all," says Quinn Ascah a student at Brock University in St. Catharines. "Public

post-secondary institutions are accountable to the communities they serve. They should welcome wages that bring people out of poverty and support laws that curb the rise of precarious employment.”

YUGSA’s Alia Karim noted that earlier this year, more than 50 leading Canadian economists issued a public statement in support of the proposed \$15 minimum wage. “Why our post-secondary institutions would be part of a campaign that undermines academic research is beyond me.”

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