

May 27, 2021

To: Premier Iain Rankin, Minister Lena Diab

We write on behalf of an alliance of 20 higher-education unions, non-unionized workers, and student associations in Nova Scotia, formed at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, we represent over 20,000 college and university employees across the province, both academics and staff, as well as students—all essential to the work of higher education in the province.

We are dismayed that Nova Scotia universities are raising tuition fees for the second time during the pandemic. The Dalhousie University Board of Governors voted on April 20 to increase tuition fees by 3% for domestic students, plus an additional \$1,473 for international students. Likewise, Mount Saint Vincent University approved a 3% tuition hike for their students on April 30. Of all the post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia, only the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design chose to freeze tuition for the 2020-2021 year, but they too chose to increase tuition for the upcoming year — a 1% increase for domestic students and a 2.5% increase for international students. Other universities have not yet voted on proposed fee increases for the upcoming academic year.

In January 2021, the provincial government announced a \$25 million investment to help Nova Scotia universities manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this financial relief, universities continue to raise tuition fees for students.

Students have faced significant financial insecurity and other hardships over the past year. For many, the switch to online learning has negatively affected their mental health. In addition, the reduction in jobs and internships during the pandemic has meant a substantial loss of income to students. Raising tuition fees even higher — when domestic students in Nova Scotia are already paying the highest fees in the country and international students' fees are several times higher — will only exacerbate students' struggles.

The COVID-19 pandemic has called attention to the urgent need to strengthen public services and infrastructure to support public health now and effective social and economic recovery post-pandemic. Universities and colleges play important roles in both the near and long term.

In Nova Scotia, institutions of higher education are significant regional employers. They also bring significant numbers of students into the province. We welcome the extension of emergency support measures for students contained in the recent federal budget. These measures acknowledge the imperative of supporting the continuation of students' academic pursuits.

We urgently call on Premier Iain Rankin and Labour and Advanced Education Minister Lena Diab to support the post-secondary education sector through this crisis. Your action is necessary to protect our institutions, our students, and our work for Nova Scotia.

In particular, we request the following measures:

1. Reduce student tuition and increase student bursaries. High tuition is already a barrier for many; particularly during the pandemic, income from part-time and summer jobs and federal income supports are often insufficient to cover tuition fees. Previous emergency support for post-secondary institutions has not translated into tuition relief

for students, which is why an immediate tuition freeze for all students in Nova Scotia and emergency financial support provided directly to students is necessary.

2. Increase funding to post-secondary institutions. Universities and colleges must be given sufficient support to manage the pandemic without cuts to or constraints on programs and services because of interim deficits related to the impact of the pandemic.

Nova Scotia's post-secondary sector is crucial to supporting public health and the economy in the near and long term, and to helping students prepare for a rapidly changing future. Education remains the engine of innovation and ingenuity fueling our province's growth and success. It is vital that governments provide the necessary supports to maintain this sector.

Our unions stand ready to work together with our administrations and the province on finding solutions to support higher education and our post-secondary students in Nova Scotia.

Signed,

The Nova Scotia Students, Staff and Faculty Alliance