

May 3, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL

University of Toronto, [president@utoronto.ca](mailto:president@utoronto.ca)  
McGill University, [president@mcgill.ca](mailto:president@mcgill.ca)  
Concordia University, [president@concordia.ca](mailto:president@concordia.ca)  
University of Ottawa, [president@uOttawa.ca](mailto:president@uOttawa.ca)  
University of British Columbia, [presidents.office@ubc.ca](mailto:presidents.office@ubc.ca)  
University of Victoria, [pres@uvic.ca](mailto:pres@uvic.ca)  
Vancouver Island University, [president@viu.ca](mailto:president@viu.ca)

To University Administrators:

**Re: Respecting the right to assembly and protest on Canadian university campuses**

On behalf of Unifor and our 315,000 members across Canada, we call upon the leadership and administrators of post-secondary education institutions across Canada to respect the right of students to peacefully assemble and protest, and to exercise restraint in any response to student encampments.

Across the U.S. and Canada, students and supporters are gathering in the spirit of peace and solidarity on college and university campuses in response to the ongoing war in Palestine that has claimed the lives of more than 34,000 Palestinians and 1,100 Israeli civilians. Like many, our union is increasingly concerned with violent police response to protests, in many cases at the request of institutional leadership.

As a union, we condemn the use of aggressive police intervention and intimidation, whether it is on a picket line or in response to a peaceful rally. Rather than resorting to threats, brute force, and arrests, we believe dialogue and negotiation with student groups and protestors is the best way to de-escalate and resolve issues.

Students have a long history of political organizing and have always played a central role in many important social movements across Canada, particularly the anti-war movement. Political actions on campuses, like conferences, student group meetings, rallies, demonstrations, or sit-ins, are all essential for the exchange of ideas and are foundational to any vibrant democracy.

Balancing public safety as well as the right to assembly is possible only with open communication and discussion. We encourage you to meet with students, unions and

community leaders and hear their demands before prematurely dismissing them. We must continue to protect and preserve public colleges and universities as essential spaces for a healthy democracy.

We thank you for your time on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lana Payne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lana" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Payne".

**Lana Payne**  
**National President**

/klcpe343