

Date: 2022-08-05

To: Students' Union Council

Re: Vice President External 2022/23 Report #6

Dear Council,

Below is a brief update of essential activities in the last two weeks.

Meetings

Edmonton Metropolitan Transit Service Commission

Last week, I met with Lucas Warren, the Communications Manager for the Edmonton Metropolitan Transit Service Commission (EMTSC). The EMTSC is a regional service commission with a mandate of improving regional transit and mobility in the Greater Edmonton region. During our meeting, Lucas and I discussed what is important to student riders and potential student riders when it comes to developing a new regional public transit system.

I will be inviting Lucas and the EMTSC to come present to Council at a later date so if you have any questions or concerns from your constituents who may live in the Metropolitan region, then this would be the platform to pass along what you heard back.

Edmonton Global ASA Meeting with Employment and Social Development Canada

President Monteiro and I met with Edmonton Global to discuss ways to improve opportunities for students in Edmonton better. Edmonton Global is an economic development organization for the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. Their goal is to transform and grow the economy of the Edmonton Region through partnerships and the attraction of investments from local government to global partners. Present at the meeting was the CEO of Edmonton Global Malcolm Bruce and the Director of Policy, Brianna Morris.

President Monteiro expressed the need for the City to improve opportunities for talent attraction through the hiring and creation of more employment and internship opportunities. We also discussed indirect elements that affect retention such as safety and affordability and asked for support on key advocacy issues such as a safer transit system and improvement of cell reception infrastructure in an underground station.

PSE in the News

Federal Government Announces Improved Financial Supports for Students with Disabilities

Earlier this week, the Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada announced improved support under the Canada Student Financial Assistance Program (CSFA Program) for students with disabilities. As of August 1, 2022, the Government extended disability supports under the CSFA Program to include those with a persistent or prolonged disability. Additionally, the Government has increased flexibility for documentation that can be accepted when applying for CSFA Program disability supports. This is great news and highlights the effective advocacy CASA has at the federal level. As a result of this announcement, students with disabilities will have expanded access to financial aid to obtain a post-secondary education.

The addition of the definition prolonged and persistent also has a huge impact. Previously, the CSFA program only defined 'disability' as "means a functional limitation caused by a physical or mental impairment that prevents a borrower from performing the daily activities necessary to participate in studies at a post-secondary school level and in the labor force, and is expected to remain with the person for their expected life." This definition set a very high threshold which is restrictive and difficult to meet for many students, particularly those with episodic conditions and those experiencing mental health problems and illnesses. While disabilities may not always be present, they may require accommodations. The inclusion of those with a persistent or prolonged disability will help meet the needs of more students who encounter financial barriers to PSE related to disabilities.

For more information click [here](#)

Provincia Government Reduces the Monthly amount eligible students receive from the Alberta Full-Time Student Grant.

On August 2nd, during a media availability, the NDP made it publicly aware that the Ministry of Advanced Education quietly reduced the monthly maximum amount that a student receives from the Alberta Full-Time Student Grant from \$350 to \$250. While students found out about it from a letter the ministry sent out last week, there was no public notice or consultation done by the Minister with students prior to making this decision.

In addition to this reduction, the government also lowered the annual income threshold from \$63,615, to \$33,180. So previously, if you made less than \$63,615 you would qualify for some of the grants and if you made less than \$32,102 then you would receive the full \$350. Now, under the new change, the cut-off is \$33,180.

The Ministry's justification for these changes is that it would serve more lower-income students and that the total budget did not change. However, our primary concern and that of our counterparts is that

- The lack of transparency and absence of communication with student organizations surrounding the announcement
- the funding for such students should not come at the expense of other, slightly higher-income students.
- If servicing more students was deemed as a priority for the ministry then why not increase the budget for grants as it has been advocated for numerous times

This news was extremely disappointing to have found out in the way it was and more so the decision to reduce support for students, especially at a time when the cost of living for students is increasing tremendously and tuition keeps skyrocketing. We will be working with our counterparts to determine what further action is needed aside from that, please let me know if you have any questions.

Cheers,



Christian Fotang

Vice President External

University of Alberta Students' Union