



ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYEES SUPPORTING EDUCATION SERVICES

103-900 Harrow Street East • Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Y7
Phone: (204) 949-5200 • Fax: (204) 949-5215 • Email: aeses@aeses.ca • Website: www.aeses.ca

Proud Member of the Confederation of Canadian Unions

April 18, 2020

The Honourable Brian Pallister
Premier of Manitoba

Dear Premier,

I'm writing to you as President of the Association of Employees Supporting Education Services (AESES). Our union represents the largest employee groups at the University of Manitoba and The University of Winnipeg, which combined totals over 3,000 members. We are also a member of the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU) which represents almost 20,000 workers across Canada. As a representative of the largest worker groups at both of the province's major universities, we are compelled to respond to your Government's salary reduction requirements outlined last week to both employers and unions of public sector workplaces.

Post-secondary institutions occupy a unique role within the Government's overall operations and its responsibilities to the citizens of Manitoba. These educational institutions prepare our youth for entry into the workforce by educating them in their chosen fields of study and by teaching them core capabilities such as critical thinking skills. University researchers contribute to new learnings in their areas of expertise and many are world-renowned for their unique contributions. Universities also provide much needed community services to our fellow Manitobans. Of particular note, the incredible health care workforce that we've all come to value and rely upon is primarily trained by the universities and colleges in this province.

We appreciate that we all find ourselves in new and uncertain times in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and we understand the stresses that are being felt by the health care community and those directly supporting their work. We applaud the Government's decision to offer a greater degree of support to these front-line workers during this time of great need. However, we feel that this Government's decision to reduce the work, and related salary costs, of public sector employees in order to redirect financial resources to front-line health care workers is severely short-sighted, particularly as it concerns post-secondary institutions.

What has been proposed will result in a fundamental change to universities operating as foundations for the cultivation of educated citizens, who will go on to contribute to the cohesive structure of Manitoba's economic and social fabric. A removal of Provincial financial supports during a time of crisis is antithetical to what should be considered. Every dollar removed from the employees of these institutions is money that is no longer contributing to the GDP for Manitoba. In fact, there is research to show that for every dollar cut, there is an even higher overall loss to the local economy. As a whole, the universities' economic impact locally is in excess of two billion dollars annually. How does the trickle-down effect of reducing the contributions to Manitoba businesses, already struggling to survive, maintain a fragile economy?

Using this health crisis as an opportunity to penalize publicly funded workers is perceived as politically motivated and serves only to undermine an already difficult situation. Although our members are

predominantly working from home, respecting the current provincial social distancing guidelines, they remain very busy supporting the universities' operations as best as possible, serving over 40,000 students from both inside and outside of Manitoba. They are also assisting with the transition to expanded online learning at both institutions to ensure that teaching can continue during this unprecedented crisis. Both institutions are working at full capacity at this time. Any reductions to the work performed by university employees will result in an extensive reduction to current education standards and will limit the education opportunities available to students indefinitely. Given you, yourself, are a graduate of Manitoba's education system, it is unfortunate that your Government has chosen to direct funding to private sector operations, overlooking the very real needs of our educational institutions that will now be prevented from producing the next generation of high-quality workers.

Of considerable concern to AESES is that the foundations of our collective bargaining rights are being set aside by the nature and timing of this financial restructuring of public sector salaries. The extremely short timeline of one week for a major dismantling of current university operations – which would happen with even a minimal percentage cut to salaries – will require potential concessions to be made by unions with little opportunity to explore alternatives. While public sector unions are prepared to participate in finding a solution to assisting our front-line health care needs, expecting the costs to be borne by public sector employees alone is unacceptable.

Our members want to be understanding of the longer-term financial effects of the current COVID-19 crisis, even though they have seen an erosion of their buying power over the past two decades in advance of this crisis. Unfortunately, they are also under the four-year austerity measures established by your Government which has further accelerated this decline. Our members have already been burdened by the idea of “rowing the boat together” and your additional requests this past week are more than they should have to bear.

Leadership is achieved by finding consensus within your relationships, instead of autocratic decision-making, during this unprecedented crisis. Our hard-working members deserve a more respectful and flexible approach from your Government. Your responsibility is to serve **all** Manitobans, not just the preferred citizens and businesses of the current Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba.

Yours sincerely,



Laurie R. Morris
President
AESES

Cc: Mr. Wab Kinew, MLA, Fort Rouge & Leader of the Opposition (Manitoba)
Mr. Dougald Lamont, MLA, St. Boniface & Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party
Mr. Kelly Johnson, President, Confederation of Canadian Unions