



March 26, 2018

Dear Minister Labi Kousoulis,

We, the Provincial Executive of the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia (CFS-NS), are writing this open letter to condemn your government's response to our outspoken support for sexual violence legislation in Nova Scotia. We stand with survivors of sexualized violence and we will not be silenced in our advocacy.

On International Women's Day, the New Democratic Party introduced The Safer Universities and Colleges Act in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. One day prior, the Progressive Conservative Party's Sexual Violence Action Plan was debated in the House. This marked the third time since 2015 that iterations of these bills were introduced in the Nova Scotia legislature. However, neither bill has moved forward due to lack of support from the Liberal Party. On March 15, The Coast published an op-ed written by CFS-NS Chairperson, Aidan McNally, "*Liberals pay lip service to feminism while failing survivors on campus, again,*" which expressed students' outrage at this government's ongoing refusal to answer students' and survivors' calls to pass legislation to combat sexual violence on campus.

In the days following the publication of the article, there have been numerous repercussions. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education immediately canceled our scheduled meeting with you, stating that you were unhappy with the op-ed and that there would be consequences. The next day, we were told that a meeting with the Liberal Caucus that was to be this week as part of our provincial lobby week would not be scheduled. Finally, on Friday, March 23, we were again contacted by Department staff and informed that neither our Chairperson nor members of our CFS-NS staff, will be permitted in meetings with the Department.

As an organization representing students across Nova Scotia, we have a mandate to advocate for students at all levels of government. Unfortunately, we have been told by your Department that until we meet to discuss the op-ed with Deputy Minister Duff Montgomery, we will be barred from any further meetings. We reject the premise that our differing opinions to the governments are justification for prohibiting us from spaces to represent our members. The contents of the op-ed are factual, based on the experiences of students and information from the public record. We stand behind the op-ed and our Chairperson, Aidan McNally.

As Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, you have a responsibility to listen to the concerns of students, even when you disagree with what we are saying. It is unacceptable that the Department that oversees post-secondary education, refuses to meet with elected student representatives because you do not like our message or the way we communicate it. We have used every channel available to us to advocate for survivors of sexualized violence, including presentations to your department, policy

submissions, petitions, direct action, and media. Students have every reason, and every right, to be frustrated with your inaction on the issue of sexual violence on campus and make that frustration known.

We are incredibly disappointed in this government's attempt to silence students and survivors. We will not stop using every tool at our disposal to ensure that we serve our members. Nor will we stop fighting to make our campuses safer by advocating for legislation.

It is our responsibility to hold elected governments accountable to students, not to placate them. If we are doing the latter, we are not serving our members' interests. The decision of this government to shut students out of representative spaces due to criticism is unacceptable.

We demand that you reschedule the meetings with yourself and the Liberal caucus, and allow the full participation of CFS-NS representatives in all meetings and committees of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

Sincerely,

The Provincial Executive Committee of the Canadian Federation of Students -
Nova Scotia

The Canadian Federation of Students is the oldest and largest student organisation in Canada, representing over 650,000 students across the country, including the students of Mount Saint Vincent University, NSCAD, University of King's College, Cape Breton University, Université Sainte-Anne, and the graduate students at Dalhousie University.