

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce, Development
and Disability
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen
Minister of Families, Children and Social
Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Qualtrough & Minister Hussen,

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA), alongside the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) and the College Student Alliance (CSA), is writing in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the ability of Canadians to make Canada Student Loan (CSL) and interest payments.

Earlier this week, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Tam, called the COVID-19 pandemic a public health crisis. Canada has taken important steps to protect the health and safety of Canadians. Importantly, the Prime Minister announced a \$1 billion health and economic response package, and \$10 billion to support businesses. Measures announced to ensure Canadians can afford to return to Canada and that Canadians without access to Employment Insurance can pay rent and afford groceries are all welcome initiatives.

However, these measures, while necessary, do not address the challenge Canadian post-secondary graduates will face in making CSL repayments as a result of the income barriers that COVID-19 presents. We therefore call on the federal government to implement an immediate interest-free grace period on CSL repayments for all graduates, regardless of when they completed their post-secondary education. This grace period should last until one month after social distancing recommendations are lifted. During the grace period, no interest should accrue on loans and graduates should not be required to make loan or interest payments. This measure would help ensure that Canadians with CSL debt are able to meet their financial obligations during and after the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Second, we are calling on the federal government to immediately implement a two-year grace period for new graduates to ensure that students are in a financial position to cover their loan and interest payments. We were appreciative to see this included in the Liberal Party's 2019 election platform, but given these extenuating circumstances and economic uncertainty, now more than ever, students need time to secure employment and create financial stability before they are expected to repay their CSL.

It is crucial that the federal government continue to respond to the needs of students during this time. The unique financial needs of students and graduates must be included in the economic stimulus package that will be announced tomorrow. On behalf of the 150,000 undergraduate students and over 250,000 students that OUSA and UCRU respectively represent, we urge you to consider our recommendation to implement an immediate interest-free grace period on CSL repayments.

If your student association or alliance would like to sign on to the calls to action, please contact communications@ousa.ca.

Sincerely,

Catherine Dunne, President of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
Cristina Ilnitch, Chair of the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities
Jecema Hewitt Vasil, President of the College Student Alliance