

## **CESAR, CFS file to intervene in Ryerson Students' Union and Ryerson University legal action**

March 2, 2020

**TORONTO** - The Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson (CESAR) and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) filed to intervene in the legal action concerning Ryerson University's most recent attack on students' union autonomy.

"Autonomy is central to a students' union's ability to effectively represent their membership. Ryerson University has attempted to violate the autonomy and independence of students' unions through a draconian move to unilaterally terminate the Ryerson Students' Union Operating Agreement," said Sofia Descalzi, Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students.

"This isn't the first time that Canada's students have faced this kind of ill-conceived attack. The Federation is intervening to make sure that all students' unions can continue to operate freely and be accountable to members, not beholden to university administrators," continued Descalzi.

Ryerson University unilaterally cancelled its agreement to recognize and remit funding to the Ryerson Students' Union, citing complaints with the actions of past executives. The CFS and CESAR stated that Ryerson University failed to act in good faith in dealing with students and is setting a standard that harms core principles of students' union autonomy, fair and free elections, and independent student voices on campuses across the country.

"Ryerson University has overstepped in every stage of this process, and they have one goal - defunding the largest democratic students' union on campus," said Nicole Brayannis, President of the Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson. "This attack on the RSU harms all students at Ryerson. It's had an immediate effect on campus life through the cancellation of educational and community events hosted by the Equity Service Centres, as well as leaving advocacy services like academic appeals in the lurch."

Students' unions are separate, third-party entities from the university or college where they operate. Students' unions are responsible for representing students to the university, including taking oppositional opinions, and require the freedom to operate without risk of losing funding and student representation. Students' unions are governed by either provincial or federal not-for-profit law.

*The Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson represents over 16,000 part-time and continuing education students at Ryerson University.*

*The Canadian Federation of Students unites over 500,000 college and university students and more than 60 students' unions throughout the country including all students at Ryerson University.*

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**PRESS BACKGROUNDER - March 2, 2020**

- On Friday, January 24, 2020 Ryerson University unilaterally terminated the RSU Agreement that has existed since September 1, 1986. The Agreement governs the relationship between both parties including the collection and remittance of membership fees. Ryerson University has terminated the agreement after a year of negotiations with the RSU after financial mismanagement in the 2018-19 executive term.
- Both CESAR and the RSU have similar Operating Agreements. Any decision on interpreting the RSU agreement will set precedent for interpreting the CESAR Agreement. Further, the interpretation of this ruling will have long-term implications on the analysis of students' union agreements at campuses across Canada.
- CESAR cooperatively runs services with the Ryerson Students' Union, including the seven Equity Service Centres, and also collaborates on similar services such as legal aid, student appeals, tax clinics and graduate photos.
- Ryerson University has unilaterally, without consultation or request for applications, appointed a Student Government Process Committee to choose candidates to succeed the Ryerson Students' Union. The Committee has also been given authority to disqualify candidate applications.
- Ryerson University has established an aggressive timeline to choose a new Student Government which includes roughly two weeks to submit a proposal, ten days to campaign and only two days to vote. Little to no resources were provided to students to research, propose and collaborate on new students' union structures. The University has also imposed rules that have effectively banned campaigning for a new student government and allow the University to change election rules throughout the campaign. No quorum has been set to validate the referendum.
- Ryerson University has failed to abide by their own governing documents on referendums that require three to four months of planning and approval at Board of Governors meetings. No public meeting or records can be found showing that this process was approved at the Board of Governors.