

**Bill 33**  
**The Advanced Education**  
**Administration Amendment**  
**Act**

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Submission from:

**Public  
Service  
Alliance of  
Canada  
Prairies**

To:

**The  
Legislative  
Assembly  
of Manitoba  
Standing  
Committee on  
Social and  
Economic  
Development**



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The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) represents more than 180,000 workers in every province and territory in Canada, including nearly 8,000 workers in Manitoba. We take our responsibility to represent our members very seriously and strongly oppose Bill 33 as it gives the government powers to override democratically established student fees and provides no ceiling for yearly tuition fee increases.

For what purpose would the Minister give himself these powers? A student union or association is a democratically structured and governed organization. All fees applied by the organization to their membership has been decided through referendum.

As many are aware, a referendum is a democratic tool that gives all members the opportunity to have direct say on whatever will affect them. This is the gold standard of democratic governance. Therefore, why the Minister thinks he has any right to interfere with and even override this democratic process is perplexing.

The power allocated to the Minister in Bill 33 would be akin to the federal government being able to overrule our democratic provincial elections in Manitoba or the Manitoba government interfering with democratically established and governed labour unions.

If the Minister has no right to interfere in the gold standard of democratic governance, it begs the question, why is the Minister putting forward legislation that would enable him to do just that? What does he plan to do with this power? What would be achieved by giving the Minister this power?

The answer is quite obvious when Bill 33 is examined with those questions in mind.

The experience of students' unions under the Ford PC government in Ontario can give us a look into just what can be accomplished through Bill 33: an authoritarian – and unconstitutional – move to defund students' unions through the establishment of voluntary student unionism.

This is what the Ford PC government attempted to do with the Student Choice Initiative, a policy put forward in 2019 – a policy deemed unlawful by the courts in Ontario just this past year.

So, I ask, why would the Pallister PC government put forward legislation in lockstep with what was already deemed unlawful by the Ford PC government?

Unfortunately, Manitoba Labour unions can answer this question all too easily based on the unconstitutional piece of legislation that the Pallister PC government tried to force upon Manitoba public sector unions with Bill 28, the so called, Public Services Sustainability Act. This piece of legislation was deemed unconstitutional just this past summer.

I hate to think of how much public money was wasted fighting against the constitutionally protected right to collective bargaining.

Manitoba Labour unions know all too well the contempt this PC government has for the democratically organized and governed Labour unions – organizations that enable workers to use their collective strength to fight for better wages, benefits, and safer working conditions.

Unfortunately, this contempt clearly exists for students' unions as well. Why else would the Minister give himself the power to override the amount or determine whether or not democratically established student fees are compulsory or not?

These fees include but are not limited to student services, health plans, food banks, community spaces, student clubs, day cares, student unions and student service organizations.

According to the Canadian Federation of Students – Manitoba, representing 45,000 students across the province – they have been told in meetings verbally by both the Minister currently responsible for Post-Secondary Education, Minister Ewasko, and his predecessor Minister Eichler, that the intent for Bill 33 is not to target student union fees and that these student fees will “not be touched”.

I ask again, why would the Minister give himself the power to tamper with student fees if he does not intend to do so?

Any reasonable person knows the answer to that question. Just ask students in Ontario who were promised the same thing by the Ford PC government.

Another aspect of Bill 33 that concerns PSAC Prairies as representatives of student workers is the unlimited tuition fee increases that can be forced upon universities by the Minister. Currently, the PC government limits university and college's ability to increase tuition fees by 5% + inflation (~6.6%) each year. This is a dangerous and unsustainable yearly tuition fee increase where the affordability of Manitoba post-secondary institutions is concerned but at least the decision to increase or decrease remains with the administrations.

Just as an aside, as a union representing student workers, we make careful notes of yearly tuition fee increases and bring that to the bargaining table. The idea that tuition fees can increase 3-4 times the rate of inflation every year, without comparable wage increases, shows a gross misunderstanding of the reality for students and workers. Tuition fee increases are squeezing student workers' ability to finish their degree and is threatening their food security.

I should also note that this is a major hardship for international students whose fees are disproportionately higher than in-province students. Especially since international students are primarily racialized workers who are limited to working on campus. They do not have the options available to other students.

What is concerning where tuition fees are concerned with Bill 33 is that the bill allows the Minister to unilaterally set guidelines to increase or decrease tuition fees at his discretion.

Based on the tuition fee increases inflicted on Manitoba students by this government, the idea that the Minister would use Bill 33 to decrease tuition fees is laughable.

In fact, the Minister has told us outright what he plans to do with tuition fees. He stated in the 2nd Reading of Bill 33 that the PC government plans to bring tuition fees "in line with other western provinces." For the record, the average tuition fees in Manitoba are \$4,740 / year. In Alberta, average tuition fees are \$5,744, \$5,898 in British Columbia, and \$7,770 / year in Saskatchewan.

If Bill 33 is passed, tuition fees are only going up. This coupled with the operational and funding cuts Manitoba post-secondary institutions have seen over the last five provincial budgets, including the most recent provincial budget. It is clear, Bill 33 will further weaken the capacity of our already under-funded post-secondary institutions to deliver the high-quality education that Manitobans expect.

In a letter from Minister Fielding to post-secondary institutions dated March 8, 2021, despite having lost a constitutional challenge on legislating government bargaining mandates to post-secondary institutions, the Pallister PC government is once again mandating 2 years of 0's. That, paired with Bill 33's mandate to legislate the Minister's interference, is a gross overreach to underfund PSE's on the backs of our members and all students across this province.

As a union that currently represents over 700 student worker members in the province and pre-COVID represented double that number, I have a duty to challenge this bill and stand up for what is in the best interest of our membership. Bill 33 provides no benefit for student workers or Manitoba's post-secondary institutions for that matter. PSAC Prairies echoes the call from the Canadian Federation of Students and labour unions across the province to scrap Bill 33 altogether.

Thank you for the time.



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