



MOTION REGARDING A POSITION ON INSTITUTIONS OF PUBLIC SAFETY 2021-01-28

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Moved by: Ayo Ogunremi **Current Status:** FOR APPROVAL

Vice-President (External Affairs)

APPROVED

POSTPONED

COMMITTED

NOT APPROVED

Seconded by: Noah Merali
Services Representative

Issue

This motion seeks to expand the SSMU's commitment to leadership on matters of human rights and social justice by establishing a position on institutions of public safety.

Background and Rationale

Several incidents of police killings over the Summer and Fall of 2020 produced a period of intense scrutiny on the role of police forces in western society, as the existence of systemic racism and discrimination became indisputable. After the police murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Régis-Korchinski Paquet, the SSMU Executive Committee approved the release of a [public statement condemning anti-Black racism and police violence](#), along with several other student associations, notably the Black Students' Network.

Until now, however, the SSMU has not taken any steps towards formally establishing a position on institutions of public safety and their relationship to social marginalisation and insecurity, which would serve as a fixed, legitimate basis on which the SSMU could make statements on issues like police violence, and which is crucial to a sincere commitment to leadership on matters of human rights and social justice. Further, the SSMU has not taken any opportunity to stand in concrete, material solidarity with marginalised communities, despite its issuance of statements to this effect.



This motion would rectify these inadequacies by establishing a formal position on institutions of public safety, and by adopting a mandate to support campaigns that align with the outlined position.

Further, in establishing a position on institutions of public safety, this motion would empower the SSMU to articulate a stance on these matters to external bodies and organisations, importantly the “inter-associatif” roundtable of student associations for which this concern is an item of discussion.

Alignment with Mission

This motion aligns with the SSMU’s commitment to showing leadership on matters of human rights and social justice, as well as to represent the interests of all of its members, including those subject to social marginalisation. It builds on the commitments outlined in the Equity Policy, the Indigenous Solidarity Policy, the Accessibility Policy, the Affordable Student Housing Plan, and the Mental Health Plan.

Consultations Completed

This motion was drafted in consultation and collaboration with several relevant stakeholders, including the Equity Commissioners, the Indigenous Affairs Commissioner, the Black Affairs Commissioner, the Anti-Sexual Violence Mobilisation and Advocacy Commissioner, the Anti-Violence Coordinators, the Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator, the Affordable Student Housing Committee, the Vice-President (University Affairs), the Union for Gender Empowerment, and the Black Students’ Network.

Risk Factors and Resource Implications

Adopting the resolutions in this motion would send a strong signal to the Montreal and student communities that the SSMU recognises the systemic inadequacies within our society’s institutions of public safety, and is unafraid to stand in solidarity with marginalised peoples who are most affected by these inadequacies. Doing so would be a very consequential step forward for the fight against systemic discrimination in society, as other organisations would be more poised to follow suit.

Adopting a mandate to support campaigns advocating that support this position would implicate the resources of the SSMU’s Campaigns department, primarily in order to provide financial support to grassroots campaigns.



Sustainability Considerations

The sustainability implications of this motion are primarily of a social and economic nature, as it seeks to recognise systemic discrimination in our public safety institutions against people in society from marginalised social and economic backgrounds. As such, this motion serves to promote social sustainability within the SSMU, promoting an inclusive and equitable community that addresses systemic power imbalances within society and fosters a culture of anti-oppression, as per section 3.2. of the Sustainability Policy.

Impact of Decision and Next Steps

If approved, the proposed resolutions would provide a clear position for the Vice-President (External Affairs) to communicate to external bodies, notably the “inter-associatif” roundtable of Quebec student unions.

Further, these resolutions would mandate the office of the VP External to support campaigns that promote the transformation of public safety institutions towards a more socially inclusive and harm-reductive approach.

If this motion fails, the Legislative Council will have failed to act in alignment with the SSMU's mission to show leadership on matters of human rights and social justice, as well as its commitments to social sustainability, equity, Indigenous solidarity, and concrete action against gendered and sexual violence.

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the Legislative Council approve the Position in Appendix A;

Be it further resolved that the office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) be mandated to support campaigns that align with this position.

Results of the Vote

In favour ()
Opposed ()
Abstain ()



Appendix A : Proposed Position

Position on Institutions of Public Safety

In its commitment to leading in matters of human rights and social justice, and in advocacy on institutions of public safety, the SSMU believes:

- 1.** That policing disproportionately harms marginalised people, including but not limited to Indigenous peoples, Black people, People of Colour, sex workers, transgender and non-binary people, Queer people, people with disabilities, women, low-income and unhoused people, neurodivergent people, and undocumented immigrants.
 - 1.1.** That these identities are neither isolated nor reducible to any one or other, and their interaction produces intersecting experiences of marginalisation.
- 2.** That marginalised people are over-represented in the criminal justice system because they are disproportionately surveilled, detained, and convicted by the police and criminal courts, and because many criminalised behaviours are the result of social marginalisation and inadequate support for social services.
 - 2.1.** That oppressive and racist colonial practices put in place with the sole purpose of exterminating Indigenous ways of life, culture, and languages, and assimilating Indigenous peoples into settler society have resulted in immeasurable harms and are the single largest factor contributing to the alarmingly disproportionate over-policing and incarceration of Indigenous peoples.
- 3.** That police interventions do not address the root causes of social marginalisation and insecurity but tend, rather, to exacerbate systemic oppression and stigmatisation.
- 4.** That neither equitable representation of marginalised peoples in the police force nor greater sensitivity training can resolve problems of systemic discrimination and violence in policing.
- 5.** That the criminal justice system systematically fails to address incidents of gendered and sexual violence, as well as the structures that perpetuate it.
 - 5.1.** That these structures and the individuals who uphold them routinely re-traumatize individuals who have experienced gendered and sexual violence.
- 6.** That, given their relationship with marginalised people, the police and the criminal justice system fail systemically as institutions of public safety.
- 7.** That the priority of any social institution or institution of public safety must be to develop practices that systematically and proactively reduce harm and insecurity.
- 8.** That ensuring public safety for marginalised people requires the withdrawal of policing and criminalisation, and the expansion of life-affirming services that respond to social marginalisation.
 - 8.1.** That such services would include publicly funded, unarmed service teams trained in de-escalation to address mental health and drug-related crimes, traffic violations, and gendered and sexual violence.



- 8.2.** That other life-affirming programs, such as youth programs, recreation programs, and social housing are also crucial to this concern.
 - 8.3.** That sex work is a legitimate occupation that must be decriminalised. The criminalisation of sex work renders sex workers vulnerable to exploitation, harassment, and indignity; makes their work more unsafe; and hinders their access to social services and legal services.
 - 8.4.** That harm reductive approaches to substance use must be prioritised by public safety institutions, for which reason all street drugs must be decriminalised.
- 9.** In the prioritisation of transformative and restorative justice approaches to interpersonal harm, over punitive and carceral approaches.
 - 9.1.** That prisons and jails are inextricably tied to policing and criminalisation, and that these institutions must be replaced by life-affirming institutions that address social marginalisation and reduce harm.
 - 9.2.** That fines and cash bail systems disproportionately impact unhoused people and people with low incomes, reinforcing systemic inequity.
- 10.** That policing and criminal justice have been particularly destructive of Indigenous peoples' models of justice, social integration, and conflict resolution, and that Indigenous models of justice from within Indigenous communities ought to be permitted to operate separately and independently of the criminal justice system, not from within it.
- 11.** That the City of Montréal must be held to its declared status as a Sanctuary City, which asserts the municipality's consent to grant undocumented immigrants full access to municipal services despite their immigration status.
- 12.** That the enforcement of physical borders impedes social and economic mobility and disproportionately harms undocumented immigrants, particularly Indigenous peoples and people with low incomes.
 - 12.1.** That deportation and the separation of families, which disproportionately targets Black people, Indigenous peoples, and People of Colour, is unjustifiable and that the financial and social barriers to legal immigration and naturalization must be removed.