

Trans Advocacy Plan

Adopted by the Legislative Council:

2023/05/11

Ratified by the Board of Directors: 2023/05/18

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[Link to Motion](#)

1. Statement of Principles/Preamble

1.1. Principles

The SSMU is committed to gender equity as per section 10 of the SSMU Positions Book and per the SSMU Equity Policy. This includes a commitment to advocate for Two Spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people (this plan will use the term “trans” as an umbrella term for these groups going forward).

1.2. Context

Global politics have seen a worrying rise in anti-trans violence, including policies to restrict trans peoples' access to sports, healthcare, legal recognition, and public spaces.¹ Trans people in Canada have faced violent online and offline harassment,² anti-trans rhetoric has emerged more and more in electoral campaigns and school board meetings,³ and drag events are being targeted by the far-right.⁴

¹ Anne Branigin and N. Kirkpatrick. Anti-trans laws are on the rise. Here's a look at where and what kind. The Washington Post. October 14, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/10/14/anti-trans-bills>.

² Julia Peterson. Anti-trans group funded by Quebec government targets Canadian activists. Xtra Magazine. March 17, 2023. <https://xtramagazine.com/power/activism/quebec-anti-trans-247757>.

³ Canadian Anti-Hate Network. Confronting and Preventing Hate in Canada's School Boards. August 26, 2022. https://www.antihate.ca/confronting_preventing_hate_canada_school_boards; Canadian Anti-Hate Network. Anti-Trans Activists Are Disrupting School Boards Across Canada. February 21, 2023. https://www.antihate.ca/anti_trans_activists_disrupting_school_boards_canada.

⁴ Peter Smith. Weekend Events Demonstrate the Need for Drag Defenders. Canadian Anti-Hate Network. https://www.antihate.ca/weekend_events_demonstrates_need_for_drag_defenders.

Columnists continue to amplify anti-trans talking points in both regional and national newspapers, such as the National Post,⁵ Journal de Montreal,⁶ and CTV.⁷ At McGill, the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism invited Robert Wintemute, a trustee of the LGB Alliance, to speak on “the Sex vs Gender (Identity) Debate” in January 2023. This event brought transphobes to McGill’s campus and furthered rhetoric that pits trans people against cisgender women and queer people.⁸

In response to this context, the SSMU actively commits itself to opposing transphobia at McGill, in Quebec and Canada, and globally.

2. Work Being Done by Other Organizations

2.1. Consultation

This advocacy plan was written in consultation with queer and trans student groups at McGill. It reflects the work countless students are already doing to improve the lives of trans students at McGill, and highlights the institutional support and changes they need. The SSMU will use its voice and platform to uplift the work being done by and for trans students on campus. Specific groups consulted in the creation of this plan include: Queer McGill, the Trans Patient Union, the Union for Gender Empowerment, and QPIRG-McGill.

2.2. Queer McGill

Queer McGill is a student-led SSMU service run by and for queer students in the Montreal area. They have pay-what-you-can gender affirming gear and safer sex supplies, discretionary funding for projects, a library of queer and trans books, lists of queer and trans-friendly resources, a safer space in the University Centre, regular events for queer and trans students, and a trans working group that meets biweekly for trans folks to socialize, share resources, and find community. They are active in trans advocacy on campus, including campaigning for relevant political issues and offering proactive support to trans students.

2.3. Union for Gender Empowerment

The Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE) is a feminist and trans-positive SSMU service that provides services to marginalized peoples in a safe(r) space. Their services include a co-op of pay-what-you-can

⁵ Tom Blackwell. Canadian specialist urges MDs to ‘slow down’ in treating transgender patients after U.K. clinic closed. National Post. <https://nationalpost.com/health/canadian-specialist-urges-mds-to-slow-down-in-treating-transgender-patients-after-u-k-clinic-closed>.

⁶ Richard Martineau. Les Wokes vivent au pays des licornes. Le Journal de Montréal. October 12, 2022. <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2022/10/12/les-wokes-vivent-au-pays-des-licornes>.

⁷ Daniele Hamamdjian. Dramatic increase in children and youth seeking gender treatments has some experts alarmed. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/w5/dramatic-increase-in-children-and-youth-seeking-gender-treatments-has-some-experts-alarmed-1.5633076>.

⁸ Madison Edward-Wright. “No TERFs on our turf”: Students rally against talk platforming anti-trans organization. January 17, 2023. <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/no-terfs-on-our-turf-students-rally-against-talk-platforming-anti-trans-organization>.

safe(r) sex supplies and gender affirming gear, an office in the University Centre designated as a safe(r) space, an alternative queer library, anti-oppressive workshops, discretionary funding, and commissioner of oaths services. They have been involved in trans advocacy at McGill since 2004, including political advocacy and proactive support.

2.4. Trans Patient Union

The Trans Patient Union (TPU) provides peer support to trans students navigating medical, social, and institutional transition at McGill. In particular, they provide resources for students accessing trans care, they advocate for better standards of trans care at the Wellness Hub, and advocate for the interests of trans students.

2.5. Other Organizations Within McGill

Above is a non-exhaustive list of groups doing advocacy for trans communities at McGill. Other organizations doing this work include organizations specific to certain faculties (such as OutLaw and Queer Engineer), queer and trans students who share another intersecting identity (such as JQueer), and alumni (McGill Queer Alumni Association). McGill's trans community is ever-evolving, and trans students are consistently creating new organizations and groups to support one another and advocate for themselves.

2.5.1. Subcommittee on Queer People

The Subcommittee on Queer People (SQP) is a subcommittee of the Joint Board-Senate Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (JBSEC). They are an advisory body with academic and non-academic staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and community members, that makes recommendations to the McGill Senate for changes to improve equity for queer and trans students. They organize events for queer and trans communities at McGill, provide resources, and advocate for queer and trans people on campus. Past advocacy efforts include the implementation of a reporting form for transphobia and homophobia, the inclusion of queer and trans people in McGill employment equity initiatives, the creation of a preferred names policy, and advocacy for gender-neutral washrooms on campus.

2.6. Organizations Outside McGill

Trans advocacy within McGill makes up just one component of a wider organizing community across Montreal, Quebec, and Canada. Other organizations that provide support to trans communities in Montreal include Projet 10, ASTT(e)Q, the Centre for Gender Advocacy, Aide aux Trans du Quebec, Divergenres, the Conseil Québécois LGBT, Interligne, and more. Advocacy at McGill is often done in collaboration with or complemented by advocacy done by these and other external organizations.

3. Advocacy Priorities within the SSMU

3.1. Student Services and Groups

Services and groups on campus by and for queer and trans people make up an essential pillar of trans life at McGill. Queer McGill, the Union for Gender Empowerment, the Trans Patient Union, and others provide life-saving resources and community support for trans students. The SSMU is currently committed to ensuring that student services and groups that support queer and trans people are provided with priority support in the form of a triage system under section 10 of the SSMU Equity Policy to ensure they get the proper access they need. The SSMU further commits itself to providing the services these groups need to fulfill their mandates, including continued funding, institutional support, and having the President, Vice-President (University Affairs), and Vice-President (External) prioritize their advocacy needs at McGill and beyond.

3.2. Commitment to Trans Employees

Trans SSMU employees report that they are often misgendered and deadnamed (referred to by a previous name) at work, particularly when they have not changed their name or gender legally. The SSMU commits to working to ensure all trans employees are treated with respect and dignity, including not being misgendered or deadnamed at work and ensuring that use of legal names is kept to only what is required by law. These commitments include:

- 3.2.1. The Office of the President will work to support the Human Resources Department in ensuring that preferred names are used in all places except where legally necessary on paperwork and software.
- 3.2.2. The President and Vice-President (Sustainability and Operations) will work to support the Human Resources Department in training staff on trans issues and best practices, and ensuring these trainings are attended and listened to.

3.2.3. The Office of the President will work with the Human Resources Department on creating a clear reporting mechanism and response plan for instances of transphobia at work, with an expedited complaint process established.

3.3. Increasing Coverage of Gender-Affirming Care with StudentCare

Gender-affirming healthcare can be a costly expenditure for many trans students at McGill. Given the lack of universal coverage for many healthcare costs in Canada (including pharmaceuticals, mental health care, and more), private insurance currently handles the costs of many forms of gender-affirming healthcare not covered by provincial health systems. The SSMU offers health insurance to its members through StudentCare, and many trans students report that this plan does not adequately cover gender-affirming procedures. In particular, coverage of procedures currently deemed “cosmetic” is often life-saving for trans people, for whom these procedures alleviate dysphoria. Other procedures are covered by provincial healthcare systems in some situations, but not all (such as mastectomies). These procedures are often too costly for trans people to undergo without insurance, forcing them to crowdfund or go into debt in order to access gender-affirming care. To help improve coverage, the Vice-President (Finance) will:

3.3.1. Improve coverage of gender-affirming procedures (such as laser hair removal and facial feminization surgery) and medications (such as finasteride) through StudentCare in the SSMU Health & Dental Plan.

4. Advocacy Priorities Within McGill

4.1. Financial Supports

Trans students, particularly those who are multiply marginalized, often face significant financial barriers. Despite high levels of education, trans people are disproportionately under and unemployed, low-income, housing insecure, and/or food insecure.⁹ Because of this, low-barrier funding sources for financial emergencies and regular expenses are essential for the survival of many trans students. The Vice-President (University Affairs) and the Gender and Sexuality Commissioner will commit to:

4.1.1. Continue supporting and expanding the QUIPS bursary, to ensure that trans students are able to focus on their education without added financial stress;

⁹ The Trans PULSE Canada Team. Health and health care access for trans and non-binary people in Canada. 2020-03-10. Available from: <https://transpulsecanada.ca/research-type/reports>.

- 4.1.2. Compiling and highlighting financial resources available to trans students, in order to ensure students know where to turn if they are in need of financial support;
- 4.1.3. Advocating for trans-specific bursaries and scholarships and for gender identity to be a consideration for bursaries and scholarships through McGill's Office for Scholarships and Student Aid;
- 4.1.4. Advocating for multiply marginalized trans people to be prioritized in applications for funds supporting other groups they are a part of;
- 4.1.5. Advocating for employment equity initiatives at McGill based around gender identity and expression; and
- 4.1.6. Advocating for financial, legal, and other support for trans international students who wish to remain in Canada.

4.2. Gender Affirming Care

Gender affirming health care saves lives.¹⁰ The SSMU commits to working with the McGill Wellness Hub and the Trans Patient Union to improve practices of gender affirming care at McGill, so that all students can access the care they need with minimal delays. Specifically, the Vice-President (University Affairs) and the Gender and Sexuality Commissioner will advocate for:¹¹

- 4.2.1. Less delays in the process of prescribing hormone replacement therapy, through reducing the number of appointments required;
- 4.2.2. Resources for Hub general practitioners (GPs) to ensure that all Hub GPs are willing to write recommendation letters for gender affirming surgeries;
- 4.2.3. A policy for trans students under the age of 18 that fits with both WPATH guidelines and Quebec laws on informed medical consent;
- 4.2.4. Policies to prevent bias in fertility preservation for students undergoing gender affirming care;
- 4.2.5. Increasing the number of doctors at the Hub who provide gender-affirming care;
- 4.2.6. Policies to ensure that trans people currently using bicalutamide or other gender-affirming treatments not offered by the Hub are able to access necessary medications without unnecessary hurdles; and
- 4.2.7. An investigation into McGill's history with conversion practices, including at the McGill University Sexual Identity Centre.

¹⁰ Diana Tordoff et al. Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care. JAMA Network Open. February 25, 2022.

¹¹ Trans Patient Union. Advocacy Brief: Gender Affirming Care. March 2023.

These changes will ensure that the Hub is a model for gender affirming care in Quebec, in line with the newest standards of care, such as those in the Fenway Health Guide. This will reduce delays for trans students accessing care, and improve the experiences of trans students at the Hub.

4.3. Hate Speech

The SSMU unilaterally condemns hate speech in all forms, including hate speech that attempts to disguise itself as legitimate academic discussion or human rights concerns. Such forms of human rights populism increasingly impact trans people, pitting the rights of trans people against the rights of cisgender women, homosexuals, and bisexuals.¹² This rhetoric has no basis in academic truth and should not be treated as legitimate by anyone at McGill. The SSMU will fight against the use of academic freedom to allow speakers to promote rhetoric that goes against McGill's mission and principles, particularly the principles of equity and inclusiveness. Transphobia has no place at McGill or in academia at large.

4.3.1. The Vice-President (University Affairs) will advocate to embed equity considerations in policies and processes concerning academic freedom.

4.3.2. The Vice-President (University Affairs) will work on educating members of the McGill community about the responsibilities involved with academic freedom, and advocate for the proper adherence to McGill University's Core Mission and Principles.

4.4. Preferred Name and Pronoun Usage

Trans students constantly face misgendering and deadnaming from McGill. In a survey of trans students conducted in 2019-2020, the vast majority reported being deadnamed or misgendered by McGill offices or organizations, including through Minerva, MyCourses, official and unofficial email lists, McGill accounts, and more. Most of those who had contacted IT Services to remedy this issue reported receiving minimal support fixing the issues, and many simply opted not to contact IT about the issue at all due to the process being overly confusing or having minimal faith in the corrections actually being made.¹³ This data reflects a consistent problem across all McGill systems, where trans students are routinely and unnecessarily referred to by previously-used names and pronouns, and required to go through substantial amounts of labour to correct the issue, often with minimal success.

¹² Etienne Quintal. "OK Groomer": Hate tropes fueling opposition to 2SLGBTQ+ rights in Canada. Canadian Anti-Hate Network. April 20, 2022. <https://www.antihate.ca/hate-tropes-fueling-opposition-2s-lgbtq-rights-canada>.

¹³ Sarah Hollyer-Carney. Preferred Name and Pronoun Use at McGill University. August 2021. <https://ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Preferred-Name-Use-Report-draft-6.pdf?x21981>.

The Vice-President (University Affairs) and the Gender and Sexuality Commissioner will continue to advocate for the implementation of the recommended actions of the 2022 Preferred Name Use Report, including but not limited to:

- 4.4.1 The creation of new documentation, general guidelines, and streamlined processes for recording and displaying preferred or updated names and pronouns at all places in McGill documentation and software (including IT Services, Student Records, the Wellness Hub, and others);
- 4.4.2 A thorough investigation into the software issues that trans students currently face; and
- 4.4.3 Improved responses from IT Services and Student Records on the complaints of trans students.

4.5. Accessible Gender-Inclusive Washrooms

Many buildings on McGill's campus do not have accessible, easily identifiable, gender-inclusive washrooms. This poses a serious concern to trans students, who may face health consequences and social harassment due to a lack of gender-inclusive washrooms.¹⁴ McGill's index of gender-inclusive washrooms remains out-of-date and inaccurate, and existing gender-inclusive washrooms are often poorly signed and out of the way. The Vice-President (University Affairs) and the Gender and Sexuality Commissioner will advocate for:

- 4.5.1 Better signage for existing gender-inclusive washrooms;
- 4.5.2 The inclusion of accessible gender-inclusive washrooms in all new construction and renovations on campus;
- 4.5.3 McGill to prioritize building accessible gender-inclusive washrooms in buildings and on floors that currently lack them;
- 4.5.4 For McGill to prioritize building gender-inclusive washrooms when deciding on new construction and renovation projects in a timely and efficient manner;
- 4.5.5 The index of gender-inclusive washrooms on campus to be kept up to date; and
- 4.5.6 Supporting the SQP in the implementation of its resolution requiring all single-stall washrooms at McGill to be made gender-inclusive, mandating each building have at least one multi-stall gender-inclusive washroom, and mandating each floor have at least one gender-inclusive washroom.

¹⁴ Jody Herman. Gendered Restrooms and Minority Stress: The public regulation of gender and its impact on transgender people's lives. *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*, Spring 2013.

5. Advocacy Priorities External to McGill

All activism at McGill is done within a wider context of work done by organizers across Montreal, Quebec, and Canada as a whole. This activism is stronger when done together, and the SSMU commits itself to supporting trans organizing in the community as a whole. The SSMU will continue to fight transphobic legislation and political rhetoric and lend its voice to campaigns for trans rights. In particular, the Vice-President (External Affairs) will:

- 5.1.1 Advocate for trans migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees to receive the support they need to stay in Canada;
- 5.1.2 Prioritize trans advocacy as a political campaign and consider requests for financial and non-financial support from trans advocacy campaigns;
- 5.1.3 Advocate for the Quebec government to immediately end all funding for the transphobic *Pour les droits des femmes du Québec* (PDF);
- 5.1.4 Support the advocacy of the Centre of Gender Advocacy in their legal fight against transphobia in Quebec's name and gender marker change laws;
- 5.1.5 Collaborate with other student unions to combat transphobia and support trans communities;
- 5.1.6 Advocate for the Québec government to mandate training to general practitioners on trans healthcare and enforce treatment standards; and
- 5.1.7 Support the establishment of a permanent, ongoing gender marker and name change clinic for trans people in Montreal.