

November 10, 2017

Wanda McKenna
AVP and Chief Human Resources Officer
McMaster University

RE: Draft Policy – Tobacco and Smoke Free Campus

Dear Wanda,

Thank you for your invitation to provide feedback on the implementation of the “Smoke Free Campus” policy. We have had an opportunity to review the policy carefully. What follows by way of response has been seen and approved by the Executive Committee of CUPE Local 3906 and represents that body’s official position on this policy.

Let us begin then by stating, in no uncertain terms, that McMaster University’s “Smoke Free Campus” policy is one that invokes the racism, classism, and ableism of prohibitionist policies of the past and should serve to remind us of what we already know to be true: you do not ban substances from spaces, you ban the people who use them.

This policy has the potential to harm our members and make it difficult for them to do their work. It infringes on the human rights of our members, of students, supervisors, and comrades on campus to do what they want with their bodies, to engage in spiritual practises without colonial imposition, and to choose medicinal treatments for mental and physical health. Moreover, we are concerned that many aspects of the policy are in conflict with our members’ legally protected rights under our Collective Agreements.

As a means to beginning the conversation about adverse consequences arising out of this policy, we have identified the following:

- Workers on our campus, many of them unionized, will be required to extend their break times to accommodate for travel-time to “designated off campus smoking areas.” If this is not allowed, they will have to cut other tasks and rights from their break-times (e.g. restroom use, eating periods, socializing, etc). Depending on where members work and their levels of mobility, they may not be able to access these “designated off campus smoking areas” at all. Tobacco-users do not deserve to be stigmatized for their addiction. McMaster’s attempt to do so is contradictory to their assertion that they are working to make McMaster a healthy campus for all.
- Workers and students who use ambulatory devices will face physical barriers and hazards getting to “designated off campus smoking areas”, especially in the winter or in the evening or early morning when light is low. This could result in slips, trips, and falls. This applies to both cannabis and tobacco-use.

- Workers and students in chronic pain may not be able to get to “designated off campus smoking areas” at all. For those who use cannabis medicinally, this will be a barrier to their treatment; for those who use tobacco, it could cause distress and be a barrier for coming to campus at all. Recommending that medicinal cannabis users take edibles instead of smoking is not helpful as smoking cannabis allows for a more effective delivery of treatment and simply stating that tobacco users stop smoking runs counter to prevailing understandings of addiction and mental health. Eliminating members and students rights to access a substance that they have a medical prescription for (cannabis) is not consistent with health promotion. If a patient and their doctor have decided that medical cannabis is a good treatment option, McMaster University has no right to stop this patient from accessing their treatment.
- Indigenous students and workers should not be required to plan in advance when they will smudge or burn tobacco and they should not have to request permission to do so. Requiring them to do so is paternalistic, condescending, and burdensome, and runs counter to McMaster’s self-professed dedication to decolonizing our campus. Moreover, other racial, ethnic, and/or religious groups on campus do not have the burden of scheduling or registering such religious or spiritual practices with the approval of the University’s security or bureaucracy prior to practice; thus, this additional scrutiny that indigenous workers, students, and visitors on campus will face is arbitrary and discriminatory.
- Requiring students and workers to stand off-campus while smoking will make them hyper-visible - this will open these students and workers up to assault. This is especially true for staff who work overnight and students who live on campus.
- Further to the question of security, it is worth noting that Glenn De Caire is still our University’s head of security. We believe that he has a well-documented history of anti-black racism and is a supporter of carding. If students and workers are to be ticketed for smoking on campus, this presents the potential for racist policing on our campus.
- McMaster University has two properties in downtown Hamilton and another in Burlington. This policy will be enforced on these properties and will result in the same potential physical barriers and hazards in addition to racist, classist, and ableist policing in the downtown core.

Given the foregoing, we hope the University’s administration will reconsider this policy and take seriously the concerns outlined above.

Regards,
Graham Baker, President
Sarah Wahab, Vice President
On behalf of the CUPE Local 3906 Executive Committee