



MEMO

From the office of the...

VP Finance & AVP Finance, Chair of the Finance Committee

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Daniel Tuba D'Souza, Vice-President Finance & Scott Robinson,
Associate Vice-President Finance
SUBJECT: SRA 17K Motion for OPIRG Referendum
DATE: November 16th, 2017

On Tuesday, November 7th the Finance Committee met to review the non-university non-MSU groups that receive student funds. The groups include: McMaster Marching Band, OPIRG McMaster, McMaster Solar Car, Incite Magazine, and Engineers Without Borders McMaster Chapter. It is the Committee's responsibility to audit the financial statements of each group, and ensure that the practices of each group are in compliance with MSU Bylaw 5 – Financial Affairs.

To that effect, the Finance Committee has reviewed all groups and voted unanimously that OPIRG McMaster have not sufficiently complied with MSU Bylaw 5 section 3.1.3. Thus we have submitted a motion for referendum for the OPIRG fee to the SRA for consideration. The motion reads as follows:

Moved by *D'Souza*, Seconded by *Ibe* that the SRA bring the OPIRG fee to referendum in January of 2018.

This memo will go over the following information

- The history of Bylaw 5
- Past concerns and efforts for collaboration between the MSU and OPIRG
- Finance Committee Decision & Recommendation 2017

History & Purpose of Bylaw 5 – financial affairs (est. 2013)

The purpose of Bylaw 5 as created: to ensure awareness and financial accountability of fees created through MSU referendum or MSU General Assembly for students and student leaders.

Prior to the 2013/2014 year, there was no university or MSU policy dictating that a Bylaw 5 group make their spending and budgets publicly available, nor was there any mechanism to help ensure that these groups were being held accountable to students. This raised concerns from both the MSU and the University in regard to financial transparency.

September 29, 2013

VP Finance 2013-2014, Jeffrey Doucet puts forward a change to Bylaw 5 with the main additions of:

- Sending all Bylaw 5 groups to referendum every three years to ensure their relevancy in a model similar to Queens University
- The SRA must send the fee to referendum to be evaluated by students directly if the groups fail to either meet reporting requirements or is deemed to administer themselves that is inconsistent with the original referendum

September 29, 2013

The SRA decides to send the Bylaw back to the Finance Committee for a more thorough consultation with the groups pursuant to Bylaw 5.

February 23, 2014

The Finance Committee, chaired by Daniel D'Angela, re-proposed Bylaw 5 – Financial Affairs after more consultation with the Bylaw 5 groups. The revisions included the removal of the automatic triannual referendum, and the addition of empowering Finance Committee to submit a motion for referendum to the SRA for consideration if the reporting regulations were violated.

- The debate around this motion was heavily centered around OPIRG with OPIRG representatives & some SRA expressing concerns that this Bylaw violated OPIRG's autonomy and that the SRA does not have jurisdiction to mandate groups to report.
 - Other members of the SRA stated that the SRA has a **fiduciary and moral duty of creating awareness of the fees that students pay**
 - The Bylaw 5 changes passed with an overwhelming majority 25 in favor to 3 opposed.
-

Past Concerns & Efforts for Collaboration

Key point in question from the original motion:

1. Refund procedure will be well advertised

Of the four years since Bylaw 5 – Financial Affairs was ammended, questions or concerns regarding OPIRG's opt-out have been raised repeadately , as reflected in meeting mintues from SRA 13G, 13O, 14H, 16K and again in our last meeting.

Most notably, in 2014, the committee of the whole discussion revealed that “there was a slight issue with the opt-out, but there are plans from both the MSU and OPIRG to make changes moving forward”. Despite the good-will of the assembly, this was clearly not achieved as in 2016 a similar concern was raised with the assembly making the three specific recommendations below:

- The assembly would like to see the opt-out process be moved online
- The assembly would like to see how many opt-outs were received
- There was a discussion about sending this fee to referendum but the assembly decided that it would be brought forward at a future meeting

These recommendations/concerns were communicated to OPIRG in December of 2016 and again in August of 2017 both online and in person. **As of September 2017, none of these recommendations were followed.**

In SRA 17J the concern of an inadequately advertised opt-out was raised again in Committee of the Whole from various members of the Assembly. In addition, the disscussion highlited members concerns with overall financial transparency.

Recommendation of the Finance Committee for SRA 17

Finance Committee Decision & Recommendation

When reviewing OPIRG McMaster, the Finance Committee was moderately satisfied with their compliance with sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2. **However the Finance Committee does not believe that they are fulfilling their duty in 3.1.3**, administrating the fee in accordance with their original General Assembly motion from 1995. The vote regarding this was unanimous by the committee. Therefore, in accordance with section 3.4 of MSU Bylaw 5 – Financial Affairs, the Finance Committee is submitting a motion for referendum for the OPIRG fee to the SRA for consideration.

In a motion to the General Assembly of 1995, OPIRG McMaster advertised that the fee “shall have a well-publicized oppportunity to obtain a refund.” Through our external

research and consultation with the staff of OPIRG McMaster, we do not believe that the opportunity to obtain a refund was well advertised and that no meaningful effort to inform students or facilitate the opt-out process has taken place.

Avenues through which OPIRG McMaster advertised the fee refund in 2017

- Rotating graphic on the MSU screens (Appendix A: *Figure 1*)
- Ad in the MSU Almanac (Appendix A: *Figure 2*)
- Flyer on the door of the OPIRG McMaster office
- Flyer given out during the MSU ClubsFest (Appendix A: *Figure 2*)

Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) McMaster

OPIRG McMaster exists to empower students and community in exchanging ideas and taking action on diverse social justice and environmental issues by connecting individuals, groups, organizations, and resources.

We value Anti-Oppression, Empowerment, Creativity and Innovation, Equity and Inclusivity, Consensus, and Environmental Responsibility.

Email: opirg@mcmaster.ca
905.525.9140 x27289
MUSC 229

View our events list on our website or follow us on Facebook to stay informed about our many public events, including a wide range of free events during "Making Connections: OPIRG's Social Justice and Environment Week," held September 25-29, 2017. OPIRG's skills training sessions, Passion to Power, held each term include workshops on consensus decision-making, anti-oppression, conflict transformation, publicity and outreach, and other important activist skills.

Student volunteers form the core of OPIRG's activism. Our student-run volunteer working groups meet regularly to educate themselves and organize around a diverse range of issues. Former working groups have included Adaptive Design, McMaster Indigenous Student Community Alliance, Fossil Free McMaster, Guatemalan Solidarity, Hamilton Freshkool, Hamilton Urban Beekeepers, Threadwork and many others. New working group ideas are encouraged. OPIRG's volunteer Board of Directors define both our vision and our activism. Join us and gain valuable volunteer experience working with an engaged social justice organization, while contributing to impactful outcomes.

Visit our alternative lending library full of books and dvds focusing on social justice, human rights and environmental sustainability issues. Students use our library for a variety of their course requirements. We build our resources based on your needs and interests; ranging from anti-racism, animal welfare, green politics, women's health, to urban development, timely zines and much more. Also available is the OPIRG button-maker, megaphone and projector.

OPIRG's core funding comes from full-time undergraduate students, in the form of a \$8,07 refundable levy. If you do not wish to support the work of OPIRG McMaster, you can claim a full refund by bringing your student card to the OPIRG office. This must be done within three weeks after the completion of the drop and add period, when your student status has been finalized. If you are not a full-time McMaster undergraduate student, \$10 will get you a **Community Membership**, entitling you to all the wonderful things OPIRG has to offer.

opirgcmcmaster.org

[@OPIRGMcMASTER](https://twitter.com/OPIRGMcMASTER) [/OPIRG.McMaster](https://www.facebook.com/OPIRG.McMaster)

The Finance Committee does not feel that these avenues alone constitute a well-advertised opportunity. More importantly, **we do not feel as though the graphics used can even be considered "opt-out advertisement" at all.** The vast majority of the graphic focuses on an explanation of OPIRG and the services therein. A small portion of text, buried at the end, and constructed with a tone of shame, invites those "who do not support OPIRG" to come to their office and show your student card. Frankly, we find it preposterous to imagine that a shame tactic, reinforced with the need for a student to physically enter their space and then turnover personal information to whichever staff member or volunteer happens to be there, is a reasonable opt-out process.

A public comparison of how the Finance Committee believes an opt-out opportunity should be advertised is the promotions done for the MSU Health and Dental plan opt out, which clearly outlines the process, website and steps necessary to opt-out. It is not intentionally crowded with other information and it does not shame a student for wanting to opt-out. (*Figure 4*). This method of opt-out was also referred to by an OPIRG Board member during SRA 17J, demonstrating the OPIRG Board is aware of the qualities of an

effective opt-out program, yet continue to intentionally disregard the Assemblies wishes to see one in effect.

Final Thoughts

Concerns regarding OPIRG's opt-out process have been repeatedly highlighted for years by successive Assemblies. Further, consecutive Assemblies have made clear and concise recommendations as to how OPIRG can overcome the deficiencies in their process, yet OPIRG has failed to take into account any of the recommendations made by the SRA. In order to fulfill the fiduciary and moral responsibility of the SRA to ensure that students are made aware of the fees that they pay, the Finance Committee and Vice President Finance strongly urge the Assembly to allow students the opportunity to have a choice via a referendum during the Presidential election in January.

I am available to answer any questions that you might have, and hope to be as helpful in this process as possible.

Thank you,

Daniel Tuba D'Souza
Vice President (Finance)
McMaster Students Union
vpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca

Scott Robinson
Associate Vice-President Finance & Chair of the Finance Committee
McMaster Students Union
avpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca

Appendix A

Figure 1: OPIRG 'Opt-Out' advertisement displayed via MSU screen network

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Visit our alternative lending library full of books and dvds focusing on social justice, human rights and environmental sustainability issues. Students use our library for a variety of their course requirements. We build our resources based on your needs and interests; ranging from anti-racism, animal welfare, green politics, women's health, to urban development, timely zines and much more. Also available is the OPIRG button-maker, megaphone and projector.

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OPIRG MCMASTER

 @OPIRGMcMASTER

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Volunteer Opportunities

Our student-run volunteer working groups meet to educate and organize around a range of issues. Former groups include: Adaptive Design, McMaster Indigenous Student Community Alliance, Fossil Free McMaster, Guatemalan Solidarity, Hamilton Freeskool, Hamilton Urban Beekeepers, Threadwork and more. OPIRG's volunteer Board of Directors define our vision and activism, and there are always opportunities to gain valuable experience through OPIRG's Volunteer Coordinator.

Resource Library

Visit our alternative lending library of books and resources on social justice, human rights and environmental sustainability. We build our resources based on your needs and interests; from anti-racism, animal welfare, green politics, women's health, to urban development, zines and more. Also available is our button-maker, megaphone and projector.

Events

Subscribe to our events list or follow us on facebook to stay informed about our free public events, including "Making Connections: OPIRG's Social Justice and Environment Week," in September. "Skills Training Series," held each term includes workshops on consensus decision-making, anti-oppression, conflict transformation, publicity and outreach, and more.

Fair Trade

Check out the variety of fair trade products, from chocolate and coffee to handmade woven baskets. Proceeds go to support the grassroots organizations who produce them.

Funding

Our core funding comes from full-time undergrad students, in the form of a \$8.07 levy. If you do not wish to support OPIRG, you can claim a full refund by bringing your student card to our office in MUSC 229*.

* Within 3 weeks after completion of drop/add period.

905.525.9140 x 27289 | opirg@mcmaster.ca

opirgcmcmaster.org  

Figure 2: OPIRG 'Opt-Out' advertisement displayed in MSU Almanac and Welcome Week preview

EVERY **FULL-TIME**
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT HAS

HEALTH & DENTAL INSURANCE

WITH THE **McMASTER STUDENTS UNION.**

f /MSUMcMaster
t @msu_mcmaster



STAY IN OR OPT-OUT

**OPT-OUT ENDS
SEPT 30, 2017**

- 1 Health and Dental details:
msumcmaster.ca/insurance
- 2 Opt-Out details:
msumcmaster.ca/optout

Figure 3: MSU Health & Dental Opt-Out Graphic