

The McMaster Students Union

PRESIDENT'S PAGE



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Content Warning: This page discusses themes of and statistics about sexual violence.

All students deserve to be free of violence on campus and within the community. However, that is often not a reality. Sexual and gender-based violence is prevalent in many forms throughout society and on campuses. It is essential that everyone plays a role in tackling this issue. As a result of student pressure, we are seeing the different levels of government begin to take action.

In 2018, the federal government committed \$5.5 million to develop a Framework to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions over the next five years. On Monday, I attended a Listening and Learning session to assist in the development of this framework. Throughout the day, I was able to connect with students from across the country, who are fighting to end sexual violence on their campuses and participate in meaningful discussions.

On Tuesday, the provincial Minis-

try of Training, Colleges and Universities released a report summarizing the results of the 2018 Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey. This survey was conducted from February 16 to April 2 of 2018 to gather information about students' experiences with sexual violence. Over 160,000 students across Ontario participated, 117,000 being university students.

With it being almost a year since the data was collected, many have long awaited these results. During provincial lobby week, one of the MSU's recommendations to Members of Provincial Parliament was for the release of this report. We believe there is great value in data collection. As students, we have always understood the severity of the problem. We experienced the violence, witnessed it, and heard the stories from our friends. However, it is impossible for people to ignore the issue when those experiences are no longer scattered throughout our communities, but rather compounded into statistics that demonstrate the prevalence of sexual violence on our campuses.

“The fight to end sexual violence will be long and arduous, but it is absolutely necessary.”

According to the survey, 3 in 5 university student respondents have been sexually harassed and 1 in 4 have had non-consensual sexual experiences. However, only 1 in 5 respondents have knowledge on sexual violence supports, services, and reporting procedures. Of those who reported sexual violence to the university, only 1 in 5 were satisfied with their response.

With the release of the results, the

ministry announced a few immediate actions including requiring post-secondary institutions to review their sexual violence policies by September, develop a task force devoted to tackling sexual violence on campus, and report more regularly on the issue. As well, the government doubled their investment in Women's Campus Safety Grant to total \$6 million.

These are small steps towards addressing the issue, but more needs to be done. The Women's Campus Safety Grant is a great resource, but the \$6 million will have to be split between 45 institutions to fund everything from training to infrastructure. With the survey results highlighting the severity of the problem on campuses, the government should make significant investments if the goal is to make any strides in reducing sexual violence.

At McMaster, we need an additional Sexual Violence Response Coordinator - something the MSU has advocated for in our university budget submission. This will increase McMaster's capacity to provide training, make changes to policies, receive feedback from the community, while also providing survivors with the support that they need. We also need to see investments in local resources that support both the Hamil-

ton and McMaster communities.

As the MSU, we also recognize we have a role in addressing this issue. Through our peer support services, we provide students with safer spaces to disclose their experiences. As well, the Women and Gender Equity Network and the Student Health Education Centre run campaigns centred around consent and the issue of sexual violence. Beyond that, the MSU Board of Directors is working to ensure the appropriate policies and reporting tools are in place for students and staff. The Vice President (Administration) is revising our Workplace Anti-Violence, Harassment, and Sexual Assault Prevention Policy to be more survivor-centred, ensuring the process is clear and easy to work through. She is also creating accessible reporting tools for students to access online to reduce the barrier of in-person initial reporting. To best equip volunteers, she is working with the Sexual Violence Response Coordinator, Meaghan Ross, to enhance training on preventing and responding to sexual violence.

The fight to end sexual violence will be long and arduous, but it is absolutely necessary. By working together, we can make sure and steady progress towards creating safer campuses and communities.

PEER SUPPORT
On Campus

The MSU offers a variety of student-run peer support services
Find out more information at msumcmaster.ca

The President's Page is a space sponsored and used by the McMaster Students Union (MSU) Board of Directors (BoD) to communicate with the student body. It functions to highlight the Board's projects, goals, and agenda for the year, as well as the general happenings of the MSU.



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