Friday, April 8, 2016

Andrea Bartlett, President

C/O Board of Directors

Ryerson Students’ Union, CFS Local 24

55 Gould Street, Student Centre, SCC311

Toronto, ON M5B1E9

**Subject: Immediate Reinstatement of Gilary Massa**

Dear Ms. Bartlett:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), Canada’s largest provincial labour federation, representing 54 labour unions and over one million workers. I am also taking the unusual step of writing to you on behalf of our Young Workers’ Committee, Women’s Committee and Workers of Colour Committee. Workers at every level of our movement are deeply concerned about the actions taken by the 2015-2016 Ryerson Students’ Union Board of Directors to illegally terminate a respected and dedicated long-time employee, Gilary Massa, just three months into her maternity leave.

It was a shameful violation of human rights and labour law but, at its most basic level, it is an affront to morality and decency. We are hopeful that as a final act before the end of your term of office, the RSU Board of Directors seek to make this right by reinstating Ms. Massa to her rightful position and providing compensation to account for the emotional distress, financial hardship and embarrassment that you have caused Ms. Massa. We also call on your Board of Directors to conduct an audit of your human resources and human rights protocols, with an eye to preventing future mistreatment.

For decades, the labour movement has fought to attain equal opportunity for women, for people of colour and for parents. The provision of a universally enforced and protected parental leave is one of our movement’s greatest achievements. The idea that parents, especially women, have to make a difficult choice between providing a loving family environment or having a successful career is a throwback to an archaic mentality.

Perhaps even more devastating than the firing itself is the body from which it came. The Ryerson Students’ Union has had a long and formidable reputation, dating back to its days as the Ryerson Students’ Administrative Council and prior, of standing up against injustice, defending the rights of equity-seeking groups and being at the forefront of movements of social justice and human rights. The OFL has proudly stood beside the RSU in its fight for affordable education and in its historic work in challenging racism, sexism, ableism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and much more.

We are profoundly disappointed that our long-time allies and coalition partners at the RSU would take such a regressive and seemingly vindictive action against a respected staff person during one of the most precious and vulnerable moments in her life. We are even more stunned that this action was taken against a unionized worker, who is a woman of colour, a Muslim, and a new mother, without any regard for the precarity of her economic status.

Ms. Massa’s termination sends a chilling message to women and new parents everywhere that their right to have both a family and career is in jeopardy.

The Board Directors of the Ryerson Student Union would better serve their student body by turning their minds to how they can foster an environment of inclusivity, equity and opportunity, instead of defending the shadow of insecurity that the unjust firing of a young mother has created, not only on campus, but in the greater community.

The Ontario Federation of Labour stands with Gilary Massa in her Human Rights Tribunal case against the Ryerson Student Union, but we hope your Executive and Board of Directors will seek to resolve this matter with the greatest respect and expediency so that you can resume your role as champions of social justice.

Sincerely,

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copy:

Renu Mandhane, Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission

Mohamed Lachemi, President, Ryerson University

Fred Hahn, President, CUPE Ontario

Shiraz Vally, President, CUPE 1281

Rajean Hoilett, Chairperson, Canadian-Federation of Students—Ontario

Saron Gebresellassi, Legal Counsel

**Send to:**

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