



**For Immediate Release
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MCMASTER ELIMINATES TUITION BARRIER FOR FOSTER KIDS

Hamilton, ON: Today, the Child Welfare Political Action Committee Canada (Child Welfare PAC) is proud to announce that McMaster University will eliminate tuition fees for current or former Canada Crown Wards for study towards a first degree or graduate degree.

In recognition that current and former foster children are some of the most vulnerable in society, McMaster will be making places available for up to 20 students from these groups and accepting applications regardless of the age of applicants if they meet the eligibility requirements below.

"McMaster understands that education levels the playing field," said **Jane Kovarikova, Founder of the Child Welfare PAC**, which advocates for improving post-secondary access for former foster kids. "People raised in foster care are uniquely vulnerable and have not had a fair chance in life."

Foster kids are typically evicted from care at age 18 making hardship all too common. It can take years to achieve stability, so tuition support without arbitrary age limits further reduces barriers allowing former foster kids the opportunity to improve their lives.

"Increasing learning opportunities and removing barriers to education for students is core to McMaster's Access Strategy," says **David Farrar, McMaster President and Vice-Chancellor**. "We are very pleased to launch this program at McMaster. It will not only help to remove financial barriers for Crown Ward students but will enrich our campus by introducing new and diverse voices to our community."

This effort supports McMaster's Access Strategy, launched in 2019, which assists students from a variety of underrepresented groups access university education. McMaster has developed programs and supports to help academically qualified students from

underrepresented groups in the Hamilton and surrounding communities to access university education at the undergraduate level.

The Child Welfare PAC advocates for barrier-free post-secondary access for those raised in care. McMaster joins a growing list of trailblazing schools that are addressing tuition barriers for current and former youth-in-care. Over the last year, Child Welfare PAC has helped facilitate similar initiatives in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. The Ontario goal is that all 45 postsecondary schools will eventually join the movement to ensure those raised in care have bright futures.

"Students raised in foster care face systemic barriers in life," said **Donna Skelly, MPP for Flamborough-Glanbrook**. "I applaud the Child Welfare PAC and McMaster University for opening up opportunities for vulnerable young people to receive a quality education."

"Congratulations to McMaster University for being the first university in the GTHA to address tuition barriers for current and former Crown Wards," said **Sandy Shaw, MPP for Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas**. "Equitable access to education is life changing and this is a significant step forward. MPP Taylor and I are proud to have worked with Child Welfare PAC and are thrilled to see that McMaster University is once again leading the way."

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Child Welfare PAC | Sue Christensen | info@childwelfarepac.com
McMaster University | Wade Hemsworth | hemswor@mcmaster.ca

Ontario Foster Care Quick Facts:

- There are 12,000 children in state care in Ontario.
- Each year, about 1,000 exit the system or rather "age-out" at 18 years old.
- About 60% of foster youth drop-out of high school.
- If studies bear out, only 80 of 400 qualified foster youth pursue higher education each year.
- From age 18 to 21, youth receive an allowance of approximately \$875/month.
- At age 21, foster youth are expected to be fully independent, credentialed, and career-ready for life as contributing members of society - unrealistic expectations.
- Restrictive tuition waivers are unlikely to be effective.
- An estimated 100,000+ former Crown Wards are in Ontario.

McMaster Eligibility Criteria:

Any current or former Canada Crown Ward studying towards a first degree or graduate degree who is academically qualified will be eligible. Up to 20 places will be made available.

McMaster Access Strategy:

McMaster's Access Strategy assists academically qualified students from underrepresented groups in Hamilton and surrounding communities to access university education at the undergraduate level. The university works with students to help navigate the application and admissions process and ensure success through to graduation. More information can be found here: <https://community.mcmaster.ca/our-programs-and-initiatives/access-strategy/>

About [Child Welfare PAC](http://www.childwelfarepac.com):

The Child Welfare PAC is a federal not-for-profit that represents the interests of children raised by the government. The advisory committee consists of professionals from academia, law, business, advocacy & public service who have lived experience in child protection systems. The complete advocacy agenda may be reviewed here: www.childwelfarepac.com



Child rights advocate, Jane Kovarikova, grew up in foster care since the age of six and began living on her own at age 16. She graduated with a BA (Hon) in Psychology at Laurentian University and a MSc in Human Rights from the London School of Economics. As a political staffer at the Ontario Legislative Assembly, she was instrumental in developing legislation that is reducing youth homelessness today. Influenced by these earlier experiences, Kovarikova founded the Child Welfare PAC Canada in 2017. This not-for-profit focuses on systemic changes that support youth success after being raised in state care. Currently, Kovarikova serves as the Board Chair of Simcoe-Muskoka Family Connexions, a regional child protection agency, and on the Premier's Council for Equality of Opportunity. She is also a PhD Candidate and Lecturer at Western University in the Department of Political Science.

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Child Welfare Political Action Committee Canada | 100 Adelaide Street West, Suite 2810, Toronto,
ON M5H 3P5 Canada

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