UWSA
THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

University of Winnipeg Students' Association
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Dear City of Winnipeg,

My name is Noelle and I am the Vice President of Student Affairs for the University of Winnipeg Students' Association. I am writing to you today due to my inability to attend the EPC meeting amidst COVID-19 concerns, and I know there are many others behind me who wish they could attend, and may now remain voiceless. I am extremely disheartened that although hundreds have voiced their concerns over the City going forward with the budget, without proper consultation, amidst a global pandemic, that the City is neglecting to consider accessibility during these times, and has effectively silenced dozens.

I am writing to you today to discuss, among your large cuts to crucial services in the city, the UPass in particular. We were notified months ago that the next UPass would require a sharp increase in price – high above the price of inflation – and we realized students would need to again cast their vote on the service. After months and months of work, students took to the polls and overwhelmingly – 82%, actually – voted in favour of keeping the service. In a university that saw 90% of cards activated, 53% of which use it every single day, we were reaffirmed that this is a crucial service which students greatly depend on to access post-secondary education and beyond.

I have met with students who told me they have used their UPass to get their first job, by successfully arriving at an interview with a reliable access to transportation; students who opted to cancel their car insurance as the cost of the UPass allowed them to sustainably get to school with less of a carbon footprint; students who although didn't have enough money to grab all the groceries they wanted, were able to take the bus to a grocery store kilometres away from the food desert that is downtown Winnipeg, where they reside to attend university; and students who use it to bus to ceremony, sweat lodges, and community gatherings.

These are all the students you have told me you cared about. From the South, the North, the West, the East, and in between. In another city – any major city across Canada – this would not be an issue, for Winnipeg would be the single major city across the country that is threatening to take away someone's access to subsidised transportation. This is not just someone's access to the University of Winnipeg; this is their access to food, to community – which I know you claim to deeply care about – to economic opportunities, to home. Students are the future of the city, and we will be here long after all of you vacate these seats, and you are effectively ripping out our seat from under us by cutting the UPass program.

I would like to ask if you have spoken to a single student during your process of drafting this budget. How many of them told you the UPass is not an essential service? How many of them told you that they do not care about sustainability and decreasing their carbon footprint? How many of them told you

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that if you pull this plug, they no longer have a stable way of accessing post-secondary education, their job, their home, their community? I'll await your answers and statistics.

Despite increased ridership, lower emissions, and more importantly, better access to services at the University and around the city, we're here. We're here having to tell you how much this means to students and how detrimental this cut will be. I'm unsure if you ever really cared about students before, and I'm not sure how a single person who uses this service will trust you if this is cut. We're here, we are loud, and we will not let this sink.

I urge you today to reconsider your plans to cut the UPass in your budget proposal. We've provided you with data, we've spent months working on a referendum that students overwhelming supported, and we know that this system, as students, helps erase barriers to post-secondary education. Now, it's your turn. You need to show students that you care about their future, their access to University, and their access to community. We've down our job, now it's time to do yours.

Best,
Noelle Sagher
Vice President of Student Affairs
University of Winnipeg Students' Association
Women's Representative on the National Executive,
Canadian Federation of Students