

Open Letter to the Board of Directors of Parkdale Community Legal Services

To the Board of Directors of Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS),

On July 6, 2015, PCLS summer student caseworkers filed an application at the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) to organize ourselves into a union. We selected the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), which already represents fourteen other employees at the Clinic, to act as our exclusive bargaining agent on matters involving the terms and conditions of our work. Following weeks of deliberation and planning, we assembled to cast our votes in an OLRB-supervised referendum held at the Clinic on July 13, 2015.

Rather than welcome this effort to unionize, PCLS responded with opposition. It moved to challenge the entire voters' list, initiating a lengthy and costly arbitration process at the OLRB. According to management, summer caseworkers cannot form a union because we "are not employees" and "do not have a sufficient connection to the workplace to constitute an appropriate bargaining unit."

We – the 237 undersigned PCLS student caseworkers, alumni, employees and supporters - humbly beg to differ.

When PCLS first opened its doors to the Parkdale community on September 1, 1971, student caseworkers were among those on hand to serve them. Alongside other staff, we helped to advise and represent thousands of community members in their disputes with employers, landlords and government agencies. We performed countless hours of frontline intake, legal research and writing, administrative work, community organizing and public legal education. Crucially, as the Clinic strove to serve the Parkdale community year round, students hired by PCLS to work from May to the end of August were, and continue to be, central to the viability of its operations. Our connection to the workplace is more than sufficient – it is consummate.

This connection is part of what underlies and informs our wish to unionize. By serving the people of Parkdale, we have, after all, learned much from them in turn. Their creative and resilient struggles against poverty in the community, as well as their reflections on the role law plays in maintaining inequities of various kinds, helped open our minds to a more expansive, inclusive and demanding notion of social justice. Parkdale thus transformed the way we think about the work of legal advocacy, clarifying our responsibility to advance not only our clients' interests but also their ideals. The drive for collective representation of summer caseworkers is but one expression of this larger commitment.

By forming a union, summer caseworkers will be empowered to determine together with residents and PCLS staff how best to orient legal service to the broader needs and aspirations of the Parkdale community. An organized workforce will also stand to foster a more democratic workplace. Among other things, this would mean a Clinic where caseload is distributed equitably, where working conditions accommodate differences in circumstance and capacity, where proposals to improve service quality are routinely discussed and implemented, where racialized, queer and gender non-conforming workers are better equipped to challenge discrimination, and where those of us struggling with mental health issues are supported rather than ignored or abandoned. A PCLS summer caseworker union is the condition for progressive change on each of these points and more.

The decision of the 2015 summer caseworkers to unionize was therefore not taken in isolation. To the contrary, these efforts have channelled the collective will of all of us who at various points over the proud 45-year history of PCLS have contributed to the success of this Clinic as our place of work.

It is in this spirit that we address this letter to you, the Board, to convey our full support for a PCLS summer caseworker union, and to ask that you do the same by withdrawing all legal impediments to its formation. To stand in the way of this drive for collective representation will serve only to drain the Clinic's financial resources, breed acrimony and distrust where cooperation ought to flourish, and merely delay what has at last become inevitable.

A summer caseworker union is coming to PCLS. Join us to give it the welcome it deserves.

We the Undersigned,

Current PCLS Student Caseworkers

Andrea Vitopoulos, Summer 2015
Elise Mercier, Summer 2015
Esther Song, Summer 2015
Jason Huang, Summer 2015
Jenna Meguid, Summer 2015
Julian Gómez Biagi, Summer 2015
Kevin Laforest, Summer 2015
Leah Horzempa, Summer 2015

Malik Musleh, Summer 2015
Matthew Smith, Summer 2015
Parmbir Gill, Summer 2015
Peggy Kitching, Summer 2015
Ryan Krahn, Summer 2015
Tyler Fram, Summer 2015
Yuliya Platonov, Summer 2015
Zosia Hortsing, Summer 2015

PCLS Alumni and Staff

Abigail Cheung, Fall 2014
Andrew Cox, Summer 2013; Fall 2013
Andri Shchudlo, Summer 2014; Winter 2015
Anna Kalinichenko, Articling Student 2014-2015
Bart Poesiat, Current PCLS Staff
Brandon Brown, Summer 2014; Winter 2015
Brendan Jowett, Articling Student 2014-2015
Caitlin Miller, Fall 2012
Carina Reider, Fall 2014
Charlotte Calon, Winter 2016
Chelo Duenas, Spanish Interpreter
Chris Donovan, Summer 2007
Chris Ramsaroop, Former PCLS Staff
Clifford McCarten, Summer 2013
Cole Webber, Current PCLS Staff
Darcel Bullen, Summer 2013; Fall 2013
Daud Ali, Summer 2014
David Nisker, Winter 2014; Summer 2014
Deborah Hannah, Current PCLS Staff
Edward Wong, Former PCLS Interpreter
Emily Hives, Fall 2014
Eric Tucker, Winter 1978
Erin Epp, Summer 2014; Fall 2014
Farrah-Marie Miranda, Former PCLS Staff
Fathima Cader, Articling Student 2014-2015
Geraldine Sadoway, Former PCLS Staff Lawyer
Gillian Fahy, Summer 2008; Fall 2009
Harriet Yiga, Fall 2014
Irina Ceric, Fall 2000
Jason Edwards, Fall 2015
Justin Amaral, Summer 2014; Fall 2014
Joseph Granton, Winter 2016
Josh Tallman, Fall 2015
Kate Hughes, Summer 1984
Kate Siemiaticycki, Summer 2014; Winter 2015
Kha-Tieu Chau, Vietnamese Interpreter
Linda Newton, Current PCLS Staff
Lisa Leinveer, Summer 2013; Winter 2014
Mary Gellatly, Current PCLS Staff
Mary Thibodeau, Fall 2015
Meagan Johnston, Articling Student 2011-2012
Mika Imai, Winter 2013
Mike Leitold, Summer 2003; Summer 2004
Mohammed Khan, Summer 2009
Natasha Manning, Summer 2013; Winter 2014
Nicole Mihajlovic, Summer 2013; Winter 2014
Nicole Veitch, Summer 2014
Niiti Simmonds, Winter 2008; Summer 2008
Oriel Varga, Summer 2012; Winter 2013
Rachel Migicovsky, Winter 2012
Ramona Radu, Winter 2015
Raquel Amarna Moscote, Current PCLS Staff
Rathika Vasavithasan, Winter 2010; Summer 2010
Raul Cano Arana, Current PCLS Staff
Ray Kuszelewski, 1989-1996 Staff Lawyer
Robin Lostracco, Summer 2009; Winter 2010
Rose Nabwire, Current PCLS Staff
Ryan Martin, Winter 2015
Ryan White, Summer 2006
Sarah Molyneaux, Summer 2010; Fall 2010
Sarah Vance, Former PCLS Staff
Sheila Cuthbertson, Former PCLS Staff
Simon Wallace, Summer 2013; Fall 2013
Sophie Chiasson, Winter 2016
Skye Sepp, Winter 2016
Stephanie Hobbs, Summer 2006; Summer 2007
Steven Sagle, Summer 2010
Susanna Quail, Summer 2012
Tala Khoury, Fall 2013
Tzazna Miranda Leal, Former PCLS Staff

Community Members and Supporters

Aaron Webber, Supporter
Abeer Majeed, Supporter
Aidan Macdonald, Community Legal Worker
Aileen Huang, Nurse
Ale Balch, Community Member
Alex Kerner, Lawyer CUPE
Alex Kokach, Law Student
Alison Starkey, Supporter
Andrew Jia, Law Student
Andrew Langille, Canadian Intern Association
Angela Elliot, Union Member
Anna Marie Hubbard, Supporter
Anthony Schein, Supporter
Azizah McClory, Supporter
Benjamin Hognestad, Law Student
Bernard King, Parkdale Resident
Bori Csillag, PhD Candidate at University of Minnesota
Brandon Love, Library Employee at the University of Waterloo
Brendan McCutchen, Labour Lawyer
Brian Burch, Supporter
Bruno Marchese, Supporter
Caitlin Hewitt-White, TDSB Teacher
Caitlin Stewart, Supporter
Calvin Chan, Law Student
Carla Lopez, Supporter
Chi Lee, Consultant
Chris Grawey, VP of Niagara Regional Labour Council
Christopher Fowler, Relief Medical Secretary at Parkdale Community Health Centre
Clair Whitehead, Supporter
Connie Collins, OPSEU Young Workers
Daniel Goudge, Judicial Clerk at the Federal Court of Canada
Darlene Lucas, Supporter
Darshika Selvasivam, Youth Worker
David Clarke, LSUC Member
Deb Powell, Supporter
Denise Martins, Supporter
Derek Chica, TDSB Teacher
Diana Younes, Lawyer
Diann Chea, Lawyer
Edie Strachan, OPSEU Executive Board Member
Eiman Zarrug, Supporter
Ella Henry, Articling Student

Esther Lexchin, Refugee Lawyer
Eugene Frache, Supporter
Eugene Huang, Supporter
Evan Coole, Community Legal Worker
Eric Florjancic, Supporter
Eryc Rybicki, Supporter
Federico Carvaja, Canadian Labour Congress
Francis Hickey, Heat & Frost Insulators Local 116
Fred Hahn, CUPE Ontario President
Gabriella Benea, Supporter
Gaelan Bickford-Gwarter, Supporter
Gary Lam, IT Consultant
Gary Perlmutter, Dispute Resolution Officer
Gelek Badheysang, Supporter
Giselle Shareei, Law Student
Graciela Flores, Law Clerk
Hillel Heinstejn, Teacher
Illana Newman, Supporter
Isaac Coplan, Instructor at Ryerson University
Jan Braun, Supporter
Jason Yerec, UNITERHERE Local 75 Organizer
Jean-Michel Cazabon, Supporter
Jennifer Harrington, Supporter
Jennifer Hollett, Federal NDP Candidate
Jennifer Micallef, Supporter
Jennifer White, Supporter
Jess Sheridan, Supporter
Jesse Gutman, Law Union
Jessica Sikora, OPSEU Young Workers Representative
Jessica Zita, Law Student
Jillian Rogin, Former Legal Aid Lawyer
Jim Meeks, Harm Reduction Worker
Jimmy McInnes, Supporter
Joanne Roston, Supporter
Johanne Bourgeois, Supporter
Joel Duff, Ontario Federation of Labour
Josh Mandryk, Labour Lawyer
Joshua Moraes, Supporter
Justin Lo, Law Student
Kalsang Dolma, Community and PCLS Member
Katherine Roy, Development Coordinator
Kayla Burtch, Community Member
Kayla DeSousa, Supporter
Kendall Yamagishi, Lawyer

Kevin Renaud, Grocery Clerk
Kim King, Supporter
Lacey MacRae, Law Clerk (CLC)
Lance Livingstone, Unifor
Laura Mather, Supporter
Laura Pin, Parkdale Resident, York University
Laura Spaner, Lawyer
Laurie Filson, Supporter
Lee Webb, Lawyer
Liam Lacy, Supporter
Lwam Ghebrehariat, Former Legal Aid Ontario Staff Lawyer, Current Medical Student
Mae Nam, Community Member
Mandi Gray, PhD Student, York University
Marc Sibson, Salesforce
Maria Garcia, Supporter
Marie Dean, CUPE
Mary-Elizabeth Dill, Student-at-Law
Matthew Tracey, Supporter
Maureen Dolan, OPSEU Member
Mayoori Malankov, Student
Melissa Huang, Supporter
Murray Cooke, Supporter
Mia Robidoux, Graduate Student Worker at UofT
Myles Magner, OPSEU Regional Vice-President, Toronto Region
Nadine Tkatchevskaia, Supporter
Navkiran Gill Sibson, Professor of Immunology and Microbiology
Navyug Gill, Professor of History
Nicholas Goldhawk, Law Student
Nick Brownlee, U of T Student
Nimet Mawji, Supporter
Oren Barbalat, Supporter
Orsolya Kiss, Supporter
Pam Frache, Supporter
Patricia Cross, Supporter
Patricia Joseph, Law Student
Patricia Reilly, Paralegal-Member of the Law Union of Ontario
Philip Diceanu, Supporter
Preethy Sivakumar, Supporter
Priscilla Chen, Osgoode Alumni
Prubjot Hoonjan, Supporter
Ryan Krahn, Osgoode Alumni
Richard Bradley, Supporter
Richard Kitching, Research Scientist
Rick Hamilton, Paralegal

Rod Bernister, Supporter
Rosebir Gill, Pharmacist
Rosie Basa, Associate at Dewart Gleason LLP
Rowena Santos, Activist
Ryan Hayes, Community Member
Sarah Lesniewski, Unifor
Saranjit Cheema, Law Student
Savannah Forsley-Langlois, Supporter
Sheila Hewlett, Supporter
Stephen Donahue, Member of PCLS
Tammy Kung, IT Consultant
Terrence Luscombe, Supporter
Teresa Portillo, Parkdale Resident
Thomas Giannini, Graduate Student at York University
Tim Vining, PCLS Member
Tom Manis, Supporter
Tracy Ford, Member of Parkdale Community
Travis McKay, Law Student
Yuen Wah Ng, Supporter
Zabia Afzal, PhD Student at York University
Zoe Dodd, Supporter