



Alberta Union of Provincial Employees
10025 - 182 ST NW, Edmonton, AB T5S 0P7
T: 1-800-232-7284 F: 780-930-3392
www.aupe.org

Dear Dr. Malinda Smith,
Vice-Provost
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
University of Calgary

On behalf of AUPE Local 052, I am writing to you to raise my grave concerns about the decision to change caretakers' shifts. As the vice-provost of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), I am drawing your attention to the violations of the principles of EDI on campus.

The Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (OEDI) highlights three areas of accountability related to human rights at the University of Calgary: Leadership, administration, and advocacy.

Most importantly, the OEDI "acknowledges and appreciates the intersection of social identities, systems of oppression, and the discrimination connected to unequal distributions of power in general and those within university structures, hierarchies, and power relations."

On the University of Calgary website, the OEDI says: "We are committed to achieving equitable, diverse, inclusive and accessible employment practices and workplaces." Your mission is to "strive to remove barriers" encountered by equity-seeking groups including women and racialized minorities.

Rather than removing barriers, the university is creating more barriers, and financial hardship, for its 200 caretakers, most of whom are women, people of colour and newcomers to Canada.

Indeed, what we see here is a case of institutional racism and sexism, where a group working in an occupation mostly limited to women and people of colour is adversely affected by decisions that have failed to take their circumstances into account. While it may not have been the intent of the University of Calgary to target them because of who they were, the effect on them has been the same.

In the past three years, the caretaking portfolio has faced cuts with the elimination of dozens of jobs and the unilateral change to the shifts they work. The change in shifts has had a significant impact on caretakers, many of whom relied on the later shifts for a \$2.50 per hour boost to their low hourly wage, which is below a living wage.

While there used to be five shifts for caretakers, this has now been reduced to two. With wages so low, many of these workers must work a second job to make ends meet. The later shifts gave them the opportunity to find second or third jobs or to take care of family. For many, that opportunity has been lost and caretakers are being forced to quit one of their jobs.

These workers deserve to be treated with respect and equity, especially when they are working for an institution such as the University of Calgary, which is a community leader, and which has made promises regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Surely, the cuts to caretaking constitute a matter of equity, diversity, and inclusion on campus. I am disappointed to see this decision was not taken with the consideration of the caretakers as a vulnerable population.

Undoubtedly, the University of Calgary faces the reality of budget restraints as a result of drastic cuts to the post-secondary education sector. In times of austerity, those who suffer the most are the marginalized members of society. However, it is incumbent on the OEDI, and the university as a whole, to protect its most vulnerable populations during austerity.

This is where the rhetoric of EDI meets reality. If we cannot protect the most vulnerable members of our community, is the university saying that the principles of EDI apply only to those on higher wages and to students with a brighter future ahead of them?

Are these racialized workers, these women, these immigrants to be sacrificed when the going gets tough?

The university must realize that creating equity, diversity requires action, not just words, and that action requires investment and resources. It is not acceptable to say that EDI cannot apply to one group, the most vulnerable group, because the university cannot find the resources in its \$1.4 billion annual budget. Any cuts to the caretaker portfolio will result in minimal savings, as their earnings are already below living wage.

Despite the claim the university has tried to “protect the workers,” the fact is that simply giving low-income jobs to caretakers is not equity, diversity, and inclusion. Meaningful protection of jobs is not merely the maintenance of positions that do not uphold the dignity of its workers.

While the president has said that “the University took active steps to protect positions,” the real effect of the shift changes will be the loss of jobs, as workers are forced to give up second or third jobs. The sudden change in shifts will inevitably lead to the loss of caretaking staff.

There is also a human cost. For example, a caretaker on the 4 p.m. to midnight shift has family commitments and is the only person who can take their grandchild to school and back in the morning and afternoon. If they are put on the new 1:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. shift, they will be unable to work this job and simultaneously support their family.

As a result, this caretaker may have to leave the university. While the university may not have eliminated this caretaker’s position, the stressful circumstances would force the caretaker out of the campus community. This would be the story for not just one, but multiple caretakers as they balance second jobs, family commitments, barriers to efficient transportation, and more.

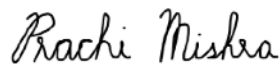
As the Vice-Provost of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, you are “the institution’s primary representative responsible for advising the campus community and the Executive” on EDI issues.

For the sake of these 200 hard-working members of our campus community, we ask that you advise the president that the decision to unilaterally change their working conditions is incompatible with the university EDI goals.

Sincerely,



Justin Huseby,
Chair of AUPE Local 052
403-880-1689
chairlocal052@aupe.ca



Prachi Mishra,
Vice-Chair of AUPE Local 052
403-890-1389
vicechairlocal052@aupe.ca