



September 14th, 2018

Joint Statement from SOCA and SFPIRG to the SFSS Board of Directors

To the SFSS Board of Directors,

Thank you for inviting us to attend your September 14th, 2018, Board of Directors meeting. As student organizations who have been on campus serving students for decades, we appreciate having the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can all continue this important work. Before we begin, we would like to highlight a few things as they relate to our ongoing struggle to secure space at SFU.

Issues Addressed in Open Letters

First, our organizations have sent you open letters with regards to our concerns about securing long-term space on campus. These letters have attempted to not only address the serious issue of any of our organizations being displaced by the SFSS, but also the many concerns that have come up over the last few years in our dealings with the SFSS. Some of these concerns include a lack of respect for fellow student organizations, systemic discrimination against marginalized students, and bad faith negotiations with student groups and the University. We would like to be clear that not a single one of our concerns has been addressed by the SFSS Board of Directors, and so the issues raised in our open letters remain outstanding.

SFSS Governance Conflict

Second, we understand that the SFSS is currently in the midst of a governance conflict, wherein allegations have been made against President Jas Randhawa, a motion to impeach him is being brought to the SFSS membership by the SFSS Board of Directors via the upcoming AGM, and counter-motions are being proposed by him to bring forward at an SGM. Some of the counter-motions include moving to provide space in the SUB to the FNSA, SOCA, and SFPIRG.

It appears that both Jas Randhawa and the SFSS Board of Directors have both been using our organizations and our need for long-term, secure space on campus as campaign and messaging tools. Allegations have been made that Jas Randhawa has been attempting to make backroom deals with student groups, promising to provide them with space in the SUB in exchange for their support of his campaign. Very honestly, we have not made any kind of deal or agreement with Jas Randhawa.

We would like to be very clear that our organizations remain committed to transparency and honesty about our negotiations for space on campus, and have sought to deal with the full SFSS Board of Directors at every opportunity possible. We have been nothing but forthright with you about the issues we continue to face, and as we have highlighted in our previous letters to you, we understand that the SFSS Board of Directors, collectively, form the entity who has the power to make any kind of agreement on behalf of the SFSS. This is why we are here to speak with you, and this is why we are holding the full SFSS Board of Directors accountable for your decisions. You are ALL responsible for the imminent displacement of multiple student organizations, and so we are exceptionally displeased by how you have ALL used our ongoing struggle to secure space as a messaging tool in the SFSS governance conflict. Just as we have been clear about what our concerns with the SFSS have been, we kindly ask that you be clear with students about the nature of the ongoing governance conflict at the SFSS.

Respectful Organizational Relationships

Finally, we would like to underscore once again our concern about the approach the SFSS has brought to community-building and organizational relationships. The June 13th letter from the SFSS to SFPIRG, signed by Jas Randhawa, states:

We hope that you come to understand this decision and can find a way moving forward to build a better relationship with the student society that is based on mutual respect and clear communication.

Ironically, this is what we have been asking for from the SFSS, and what the SFSS has yet to demonstrate a willingness to engage in. Tactics of intimidation and coercion have been utilized in dealings with our organizations, such as the imposition of unreasonable deadlines with virtually no notice, and the implicit threat of displacement if we do not move mountains in order to meet your imposed timelines.

We have previously named the extreme power imbalances between our organizations, caused by the disparity in resources available, the SFSS's comparative ease of access to a relationship with SFU, and the SFSS's control of campus space for student organizations. Because of all these reasons, we once again had no choice but to act within your timeline when you invited us to this Board meeting with less than 3 days' notice with very little information about what would be discussed.

We believe that if the SFSS Board of Directors had a genuine interest in working with our organizations to resolve the student space crisis and to address the many issues we have brought up with you, that you would have collaborated with us to find a time that was agreeable for all parties. This is not about personal preference or convenience, this is a matter of mutual respect, compassion, and community-building. This approach to how the SFSS builds relationships has very real impacts on people; for example, one of SFPIRG's staff members lives with chronic illness, and in order to attend this meeting, was forced to reschedule four medical appointments. The sense that the SFSS would

have proceeded with this conversation about student space that we were invited to, with or without us, leaves us concerned about the SFSS's genuine interest in good faith organizational relationships. We sincerely hope that you reconsider how you approach this work of nurturing student community on campus because, as we hope you have been coming to understand, the SFSS cannot serve students in a silo.

Conclusion

The above issues notwithstanding, we remain hopeful that the student space crisis at SFU can be solved; however, this will require the SFSS Board of Directors to genuinely revisit decisions that have been made about organizational suites in the SUB, subleases in the Rotunda, and organizational relationships with your fellow student groups.

A meaningful step in this direction would be to extend the subleases of all groups currently housed in the Rotunda, allowing them to stay in their spaces until the SUB has been completed. With the recent announcement that the SUB is not projected to be completed until March 2019 at the earliest, there is no reason to impose December 14th, 2018, as an eviction date. We ask you to please extend our current subleases.

Furthermore, we once again implore you to reconsider the shared space model that is being considered for the SUB. This model contradicts the results of BuildSFU's own consultation process, calling into question whether oversight and stewardship of the multimillion-dollar project has ever been genuine. Students, building architects, and the University were all led to believe for years that the organizational suites in the SUB would become the new homes for the student organizations on campus. Please, please reconsider how you are allocating organizational suites in the SUB.

Students are eager to see this space crisis resolved, so that our organizations can continue to focus on what we do best: serving students.

We hope you'll work with us to help make that happen.

Sincerely,

The Executive Team
Students of Caribbean & African Ancestry (SOCA)

The Board of Directors
Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG)