

Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty and Staff Caucus
Response to McGill University's Action Plan to Address Anti-Black Racism
12 November 2020

The Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty and Staff Caucus is heartened to see that McGill University, through the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), has developed and made public its Action Plan to Address Anti-Black Racism. Too often, statements that confirm the prevalence of anti-Black racism are empty words without deed, even as it is widely acknowledged that eradicating the systemic, entrenched anti-Black racism at McGill University and in Canadian society demands concrete, sustained, and targeted action. The issues raised below lead us to start the reflection on the implementation phase of the plan. The Caucus seeks assurance that it will be a partner in decision making, in addition to being part of the consultation with the Black community of the University. Given our shared commitments to creating favourable conditions for substantive change at McGill, we hope that the following issues will be addressed in the spirit of accountability and transparency:

1. The Action Plan details a commitment to “undertake an expanded McGill history project that will investigate McGill’s connections with the transatlantic slave trade” (p. 19). Our original Statement of August 1, 2020, requested that McGill strike a Task Force on Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism. The formation of a university-level Task Force would guarantee the funding, administrative support, and gravitas necessary to fulfill this important mandate. One difference between task forces and research project teams is the assignment of authority and resources, i.e. personnel and materials needed to ensure the success of the task force. McGill’s connection to the transatlantic slave trade is not simply a matter of intellectual curiosity; it is the beginning of an investigation into the means by which we can achieve reparative justice. We seek to understand if the scope of the proposed ‘expanded history project’ would achieve the same outcome as a task force and if the findings would be similarly embraced by the University. It is therefore essential that the Caucus be involved in the design of the “expanded McGill history project”, including the drafting of its Terms of Reference.

2. The Action Plan provides targets for faculty and staff recruitment over the next twelve years (p. 31-33). We consider these commitments to be of the utmost importance, and as such we understand that these targets should be treated as the **minimum** number of faculty and staff McGill seeks to recruit, and in the short to medium term the university will work toward exceeding these targets. In order

for these initiatives to be successful, and against a background of [contrived explanations for the failure to hire Black faculty](#), however, McGill needs to address two key issues: the pipeline and retention. First, the development of a pool of Black faculty and staff to recruit from requires creativity. Cluster hiring should be considered, a practice that had been widely used by peer universities to address the diversity issue. In addition, models from the University of California and the University of Chicago, which fund post-doctoral fellowships in order to create this kind of pipeline, are excellent examples. Second, McGill must develop concrete mechanisms to retain Black faculty and staff. As outlined in our August 1 statement, this should include specifically designated funding for Research Chairs and spousal hires. With regard to the goal of increasing the number of Black non-academic staff, the University should explicitly commit to filling some of the positions at the senior, executive level. The Vice-Principal (Administration & Finance) must also engage all administrative units to meet the goals of the Plan. Specific plans for the professional development of Black non-academic staff should be spelled out. Without attention to these issues, any recruitment efforts will be significantly undermined, because our new hires will probably leave McGill after a few years, leaving us in the same position in which we began.

3. The Action Plan proposes to establish a Working Group to explore possible expansion of the African Studies Program to include African diasporic/Black Studies. The Caucus acknowledges the recent invitation to participate in the Working Group, but, nevertheless, would like to ensure that its expertise is fully recognized both in the formation of the Working Group and in the drafting of the Terms of Reference.
4. The Action Plan recognizes that successful implementation depends on its acceptance at all levels of the University. It should therefore incorporate explicit steps to ensure that Deans, Directors, Chairs and other unit heads sign on to the vision and goals of the Plan.
5. The Action Plan (p.43) gives oversight responsibility to the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic). While this might be a convenient, short-term arrangement, the Caucus reaffirms its recommendation that responsibility for university-wide equity initiatives be vested in an office headed by a senior

executive (e.g. a Vice-Principal), properly funded and staffed, with a great deal of autonomy, and reporting directly to the Principal. Among the responsibilities of such an office would be the development of mechanisms for handling complaints by faculty, staff and students about microaggressions and discrimination.

6. The Action Plan commits \$15 million over five years for implementation and identifies several measures for accountability and transparency. The Plan should demonstrate the feasibility of this commitment in relation to the hiring targets and other actions by providing a projection, however tentative, on how the money is expected to cover the costs. If the current Black faculty and staff are expected to assist in the implementation of the Plan, it would be appropriate that they be compensated (e.g. course release time, work-load adjustments, staffing reallocations, etc).

We look forward to continued cooperation with the administration to ensure that the Caucus plays a leadership role in the successful implementation of the Action Plan, ensuring that it truly contributes to building a better university and enhances its overall excellence.