

**POLICY STATEMENT ON STRIKES OR OTHER COLLECTIVE ACTION TAKEN AT FIELD PLACEMENT  
AGENCIES**

**School of Social Work, McMaster University**

Social Work has, historically, sought to ally with social movements seeking to foster individual and collective welfare and to enhance social justice. Accordingly and in keeping with its philosophy, the School of Social Work takes the position that as social workers we stand in solidarity with unionized persons engaged in legal action to defend clearly-articulated rights and entitlements. Specifically, we as a social work school will respect the process of legal strikes or other forms of work stoppages which result from a breakdown of the collective bargaining process. We will also support and show solidarity with those engaged in legal protest against the loss of legitimate entitlements. However, the School will not compel or counsel students to take positions which are contrary to their own principles.

**Strike Action at Field Placement Locations**

If social workers employed by agencies which are serving the School as field placement sites enter into legal work stoppages, the placement will be suspended. If students choose to cross picket lines into placement the School will not acknowledge hours/days spent so engaged. An option will exist for students either to join picket lines or to engage in alternative activities related to their social work education. These activities must be discussed with and approved by their seminar leader. Wherever possible and appropriate, students and field instructors should review in writing the student's progress to date prior to the day of the strike. Since collective action through strikes is very much a part of our broader experience, mandate and process, students who join picket lines will be credited for time in placement. No make-up time will be required for those students who join in legal collective action. However, during strikes which continue for extended periods, alternative learning activities to meet course requirements will be provided by the School following consultation with the students involved.

In cases of illegal strikes, students in placement are advised to engage in alternative educational activities. Students should not be encouraged either to cross illegal picket lines, or to join illegal picket lines.

**Risks**

The student should be informed that there are risks to crossing a picket line and risks involved in engaging in any strike activities. Students should also be informed that the University and Field Placement settings may not be liable for any mishap or injury incurred while engaged in collective action.

**Collective Action Through General Protests**

From time to time, and increasingly during these times of welfare cutbacks, social groups will engage in protests against state/institutional action. For the most part, students will have a full appreciation of the issues involved. However, we at the School of Social Work should have two responsibilities. Firstly,

we should include discussion and analysis of these events within the context of support for peaceful and legal collective action in defence of social entitlements. Secondly, we should encourage our students to respect legal collective action engaged as a means of advancing the social good.

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