

Dear USA Members,

Negotiations with university management have taken a bad turn. Here is what is happening. Last Thursday, we were told by management that we must agree to long furloughs (which are, effectively, temporary layoffs) for hundreds of PSU and USA staff members at UMass Amherst in the coming weeks, with a couple of additional rounds of furloughs and potentially some permanent layoffs to follow this year.

We want to make it clear: we do not accept these outrageous demands as legitimate acts of bargaining, and they must stop. We call on the administration to return to the bargaining table in good faith, honoring our main contract and six COVID-19 agreements. In our agreements, hammered out over years of contract bargaining and months of daily negotiations during COVID-19, the administration must share financial information and explore a number of alternative cost-saving measures with us before taking actions like these.

While we have not been given a reason for this dangerous and disrespectful shift from Chancellor Subbaswamy and the UMass Amherst administration, we note that it mirrors calls for deep cuts at the other UMass campuses this past week. Because of this timing, we believe that they may be responding to pressure from the very top—UMass President Marty Meehan and the UMass Board of Trustees—to implement the board's recently passed "balanced" (austerity) budget for FY2021 that would require the campuses to resort to layoffs and cuts rather than using reserves to weather this generational crisis.

Regardless of the reason, this behavior by the UMass Amherst administration is extraordinarily damaging to our ability to trust them and threatens the breakdown of negotiations.

We cannot trust an administration that uses shock tactics to get its way in bargaining, especially during a public health crisis.

We cannot trust an administration that, despite repeated promises, refuses to open the books and deal with us honestly. UMass is a public institution supported by public funds, and we need full budget transparency during this crisis. As we outlined in our 7/24 email, with more than \$1.3 billion in UMass system reserves, there is no reason for austerity measures right now (attached).

Finally, **we cannot trust an administration that simply won't explain why they are refusing to consider the alternative cost-saving measures** that they are bound, by agreement, to explore with us. As an example, not proactively contacting the Commonwealth's Rapid Response team, which is tasked with helping employers and workers avoid mass layoffs and long-term furloughs through efforts like the [WorkShare Program](#), which is a better and more humane alternative to furloughs and layoffs. PSU and USA met with representatives from the program on August 11, who informed us

that WorkShare is a “perfect fit” for the workforce challenges we’re facing. We told management about this meeting the same day. Then, when we asked the administration on August 20 if they had followed up with the state about WorkShare, they told us they “don’t even know what the program is.”

In addition to these bad-faith actions, the university has been failing on a number of fronts in response to the public health aspect of this crisis. They have not taken seriously the governor’s directive to have as many employees work remotely as possible—we are continuing to see members forced to come to campus despite being able to work remotely. They have failed to clearly and consistently communicate the campus plan for COVID-19 testing. They have been denying reasonable flexible work requests and failing to explore alternative assignments for people in high risk groups, parents, and individuals who have demonstrated they can perform their duties remotely. And they have failed to establish consistent guidelines across campus for reopening safely. Based on the few reopening “plans” we have seen, employees are being asked to come back to campus and work in environments where their health and safety are not being thoroughly considered and adequately protected.

We believe there is a crisis of leadership on this campus. Leaders build trust by keeping their promises, acting transparently and with a clear moral purpose. Leaders put people first, not financial holdings or political ambitions.

If the administration can’t lead, then we have to accept that it is time for us to come together and discuss how we can provide the direction that our university desperately needs. During this difficult time, the efforts of elected union leaders like us won’t be enough. Together, we will need to talk about what we are all willing to do as we stand against threats, dishonesty, and bad management.

Right now, we need your help in sending a message directly to Chancellor Subbaswamy by signing this petition: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/umass-honor-your-agreements/>

If you have not done so already, you also need to take action by sending a message to Meehan and the UMass Board of Trustees: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/tell-umass-president-marty-meehan-no-cuts-to-personnel/>

We will not stay silent while the administration threatens us with drastic and dangerous actions because they won’t or can’t stand up to Marty Meehan and the Board of Trustees.

Together in union, we demand that UMass Amherst honor its agreements with us.

In Solidarity,

Risa Silverman and Brad Turner, Co-Chairs, PSU Amherst

Leslie Marsland, President, USA

Eve Weinbaum, President, MSP