

# UMass Amherst Staff Unions Reach Reopening Agreement With University

Late last week, AFSCME, PSU, and USA signed our sixth agreement with management regarding reopening the campus. Our agreement is attached and will be posted on the USA Website.

Here are the key points:

- **The university has agreed to provide a safe workplace consistent with our collective bargaining agreement and state and federal standards (e.g., COVID-19, OSHA, Massachusetts General Law Chapter 149).** We believe this means that they must provide working conditions that meet health and safety standards provided for in all relevant federal, state, and local laws and regulations, generally accepted standards, and the dictates of common sense. For example, we expect the university to follow—at a minimum—the mandatory [Massachusetts COVID-19 Higher Education Control Plan](#).
  - **The university will provide appropriate personal protection equipment and safety equipment for employees and shall train employees how to use the equipment and follow safety and health protocols.** Employees are likewise required to follow all university-mandated safety protocols, including protocols for cleaning and disinfecting, wearing masks, and social distancing.
  - **As many people as possible should continue to work remotely/telework to de-densify the campus** and reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
  - **Parking costs will be reduced by 50% for all staff with an assigned lot for the fall semester (September–January), whether working remotely, on site, or in a hybrid approach.** The staff unions proposed this plan as an equitable solution for all staff, a wide mix of whom will be working off-campus and on-campus. This reflects our willingness to chip in to resolve campus budget concerns, our goodwill and commitment to the campus, and our resolve to protect the livelihoods of our most vulnerable workers.
  - **A 10-day notice** must be given prior to a change in your status as onsite (critical and necessary), remote, or hybrid.
  - **A new form, the Staff Flexible Working Arrangement Request, is being developed for employees to request remote or alternative safe**
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**assignments, including those who fall within high risk categories as outlined by the CDC** (individuals 65 or older and those with underlying medical conditions) **and** those who do **not** fall within high risk categories.

- **Requests for flexible working arrangements** shall not be unreasonably denied, and employees will not be required to use their accrued time while a determination is pending.
  - **Management has agreed to make every reasonable effort to ensure no employee falls off payroll due to COVID-19.** In some cases, employees may be required to use their accrued time, and hopefully, such circumstances will be rare.
  - **Support and flexibility for employees who have dependents that are school-age or need daycare.** Management will make every reasonable effort to be flexible with regard to assignments, schedules, and work hours for employees who need childcare and/or have dependents attending school at home. Employees who are unable to secure their full work hours through an alternative work schedule or other adjustment may use accrued time as eligible under the collective bargaining agreement or benefits accorded under the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (FFCRA). The university and the unions also understand that while FFCRA childcare leave may only be used in single-day increments, employees can use accrued time and FFCRA within the same week (just not on the same day). We have agreed to revisit this part of the agreement once all school district reopening and/or reclosing plans are formalized.
  - **Efforts to keep onsite staff safe include: daily COVID-19 symptoms checklists, symptomatic testing, and asymptomatic surveillance testing.** Upon request of the university, staff may be tested for COVID-19, and test results are confidential, private, and shared on a need-to-know basis according to relevant public health protocols. Asymptomatic surveillance testing will also be made available to employees, at the discretion of the university. Management has agreed that employees who work onsite can participate during their work hours in regular, ongoing surveillance testing. Tests performed at the university will be billed to the appropriate insurance carrier with no out-of-pocket cost to employees.
  - **Management has agreed to limit the number of employees who work on Labor Day, Columbus Day, and Veterans Day, and to give those employees as much advance notice as possible, and to compensate those employees according to the union contract.** Additionally, the
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university has agreed to accommodate personal needs as much as possible within operational limitations.

- **We will be continuing joint labor-management discussions throughout the fall term as reopening issues arise.**

As we get closer to students coming back to our campus in large numbers, we will be focusing intensely on workplace safety. This includes making sure that the university keeps its commitments around providing a safe working environment for everyone on campus, and discussions of what we will do if they don't.

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