

PSU/USA Initial Response to Chancellor's Fall Reopening Plan

April 22, 2021

Dear Members,

As union leaders of [the University Staff Association and Professional Staff Union, we wanted to offer a few initial thoughts on Chancellor Subbaswamy's [email today regarding fall reopening](#), as well as the administration's just-released [Fall 2021 Operational Plan](#).

Onsite vs. Remote Work

The chancellor's pronouncements that 1) all employees are to be considered onsite this fall, and only hybrid or remote if "approved by a unit's vice chancellor," and 2) the "transition of staff back to campus back should continue through the spring semester and through the summer as operational need dictates," would be contingent on Governor Baker ending his declaration of a COVID-19 state of emergency, including the Phase IV [office occupancy requirements \(currently at 50%\)](#), which encourages employers to "have workers continue to telework if feasible." Until the governor ends the COVID-19 state of emergency, our COVID-19 agreements that include hybrid and remote work must remain in effect.

Working conditions are fundamental, mandatory subjects of bargaining, and we will hold the university to their legal obligation to negotiate with us. We have heard from many of our members about the importance of remote and flexible working arrangements, and we are in the process of organizing all-member meetings to help set our unions' priorities on these issues. Watch for details soon.

Finally, when the pandemic and state of emergency is declared over, our contractual language regarding flexible schedules and remote work are still in effect and must be followed. USA has flexible work language in our contract (Article 8, section D) and the bargaining team will be proposing new language on remote work.

Funding Details

Frankly, we found the chancellor's discussion of the university's finances to be disappointing. In this message, he continues to obscure our financial footing while failing to provide the details that we have requested about the use of funds from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF I, II, and III). For now, please note the following:

- The chancellor fails to acknowledge the cost savings from member furloughs, VSIPs, and vacancies—which have increased the workloads of all remaining staff and faculty.

- The \$25 million going to students in HEERF III will free up \$25 million that was already budgeted to student aid, allowing the previously allocated \$25 million to be used for institutional needs, including staffing. Combined with the \$25 million from this package that is allocated to institutional needs, we are actually seeing a \$50 million gain in available funds that should be used to support our students and bring staff back.
- We have significant concerns about putting the excess HEERF money into a “Contingency Reserve Fund,” to be used however administrators see fit. While we are pleased to see that the chancellor acknowledges that this reserve *could* be used to avert any future furloughs, UMass staff deserve a signed agreement that provides for full staffing and employment security, and we deserve it now. Chancellor Subbaswamy already has access to tens of millions in HEERF funds, and has yet to choose to use these funds to assist or even bring back our workers who remain on indefinite furlough and time reductions.

While the chancellor took a moment to thank students, faculty, and staff for “persevering” through the last year, he gave no thanks to any of us for willingly stepping up and sacrificing 6% of our pay through last year’s voluntary furloughs. He offered no acknowledgment or even basic human sympathy for those forced into indefinite furloughs, who have had to face housing and food insecurity, and navigate unemployment because UMass insisted on transferring the costs of the pandemic to their own employees—while over \$400 million in available funds sat in the bank, untouched.

And while listing his thanks for those who helped secure recovery funds, he offered no recognition of Labor’s role in advocating for and securing: three rounds of HEERF funding, additional COVID-19 relief funding to the Commonwealth, and level funding from the Commonwealth to UMass.

Thank you for your support of our union. Please be on the lookout for details about an upcoming member meeting!

In Solidarity,

Leslie Marsland, President, USA
Risa Silverman and Brad Turner, Co-Chairs, PSU