

5/1/2020 [Allunit] MSP Response to Furloughs

Dear colleagues,

Thanks to everyone who attended the virtual General Assembly on Monday. We had a great turnout with almost 200 faculty and librarians in attendance. The slides that we presented are posted on the MSP website:

<https://umassmsp.org/home-page-announcement-section/4-27-2020-membership-meeting/>. We are responding to the questions that came up, and we will add answers to the FAQ as well.

Shortly after the General Assembly, MSP learned that the administration is making two proposals for short-term savings.

First, they are creating a Voluntary Separation Incentive Program (VSIP) to provide one-time financial payouts to individuals who retire or leave UMass. The amounts range from \$10,000 for people with ten years at UMass, to \$30,000 for employees with 30 years of service.

Second, the administration is asking for unpaid furloughs (five days without pay) for all non-student employees on campus. As we have said, furloughs cannot be imposed on unionized employees without negotiation – that would violate the collective bargaining agreement and is illegal (<http://masscases.com/cases/sjc/420/420mass126.html>). The administration is asking us to agree to furloughs in order to help resolve the existing \$9 million budget deficit for the rest of FY2020.

We understand the administration's anxiety about the upcoming year. But we also think that decisions should not be made out of panic and lack of information. The MSP has several responses to this request:

1. We have not seen evidence that this step is necessary. Our contract says that if the university is facing a situation of “financial exigency” they must share all “accurate information, statistics and/or financial data related to such plan.” We have seen nothing.
2. We have not been told that the furloughs would mitigate the need for layoffs or personnel reductions in FY21. The administration has offered no “quid pro quo” or reassurances that furloughs will prevent future issues. Without something of value to make up for our members’ sacrifice, MSP could not agree to furloughs.
3. Before we would agree to furloughs, we would need to know why the university has not considered other very basic options for closing the immediate \$9 million gap:

1. Energy savings from closing buildings on campus this semester, as well as the recent sale of Waltham property that brought in \$17 million
 2. A moratorium on paying the interest on University debt would save more than \$15 million this fiscal year
 3. Voluntary options should be pursued before furloughs, including the paid leave provisions in the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act
 4. No cuts should be made until the next CARES Act is unveiled, which we expect shortly; federal stimulus funds should close the gap for FY20
 5. The UMass system maintains a reserve fund, which should be used for immediate budget deficits. According to the President's office, "*The Stabilization Reserve shall only be used in the event of a one-time disruption in funding due to economic uncertainty, adverse market conditions, cyclical recession, catastrophic interruption of service, or other unanticipated volatility in the operating environment.*" Now is the time.
4. The administration has not explained the urgent need to close the FY20 budget gap so quickly. Campus reserves could cover the deficit, or the deficit easily could be carried over into the summer.
 5. For some staff unions at UMass, the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program can provide individuals with full pay – or more – during a week-long furlough. PUA eliminates the usual one-week waiting period for Unemployment Insurance (UI), and also provides a \$600 weekly supplement on top of a portion of salary. Individuals earning less than \$62,000 would not suffer economic harm if they collect UI this spring. A targeted use of UI might make sense for some bargaining units, and we absolutely support the other unions in their negotiations on this issue. Unfortunately, the UI system will not similarly compensate most MSP members; without compensation in some other form, the MSP could not accept furloughs.

MSP members are a diverse group – part-time faculty, tenured faculty, research faculty on soft money, librarians, clinical nursing faculty, and more – and we are aware that each group has its own concerns and vulnerabilities. Some of our members have already been informed about non-reappointment for the fall – an invisible form of layoff that is unique to faculty.

For the past two months, the faculty has worked very hard under difficult conditions to transition to remote teaching. We have offered emotional, intellectual, and social support to our undergraduate and graduate students, and we have put in far more hours of work than we do during a regular term. We also expect to do extra work this summer to prepare for fall, as we try to balance our research demands and our increasing student needs. We have done all of this without resentment and without requiring extra compensation. We are giving over 100% of ourselves. Cutting our pay at this moment is not the right thing to do.

We are negotiating with the administration tomorrow and again next week, and we will keep you posted on our progress. Rest assured that the MSP will work tirelessly to protect our members' working conditions, and we will also work in solidarity with all campus employees to fight for fair and equitable treatment for all.

In solidarity,

Eve

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