



October 3, 2017

Dear President Stearns,

We are writing to express our strong disagreement with the decision to not allow Staff Senate to hire an administrative support person to replace Judy Wellert, who retired in August from that role. This decision fundamentally compromises the Staff Senate's ability to continue our important work as partners in the shared governance of the University. We are the elected representatives for all staff, and this position is our voice. Losing this position places a special hardship upon staff that effectively silences an entire employment class.

Interim Vice President Keller explained that her decision to not fill the position is based on the dire financial situation facing the University; only positions considered essential to the mission will be replaced. While we understand her philosophy, we disagree with the evaluation that this position is not essential to the mission. We strongly believe that Staff Senate plays a critical role in the shared governance of UM, and in order to fulfill that role, we need support, just as the other shared governance bodies do.

We believe the University has a legitimate institutional interest in supporting staff. In fact, we believe that decisions made during this difficult time of financial strain demonstrate the ongoing importance Staff Senate's ability to provide a vital staff perspective. This decision typifies an ongoing expectation that staff should continue to pick up extra duties that are dropped in the vacuum of vacancy savings, retirements, and lay-offs. This case is substantively different as it affects not just a single employee or unit, but all staff employees.

Without administrative support, we are left facing hard questions about how Staff Senate can continue its work. In order to serve the University through Staff Senate, classified staff must have the approval and support of their supervisors. As hourly employees, we are taking time from our jobs to participate. Since Judy's retirement we prioritized the crucial aspects of her work that needed to continue until we could replace her. This arrangement was an untenable short-term solution and cannot practically continue to be accomplished by Senators who are also being asked to take on additional duties in their daily jobs.

This half-time position (.5FTE) was budgeted for \$16,710 (including benefits). We argue that this small but critical role must be filled, as the loss to the institution is far greater than the meager amount potentially saved. Staff Senate has a long history of working to achieve the level of impact and respect that we have today. We do not want UM to regress to the days when the staff voice was not heard. There is a pervasive feeling among staff that our role is not

valued, that our perspective is not appreciated, and that we are not respected on the same level as other shared governance bodies. It is very difficult to imagine the Faculty Senate not having the administrative support required to accomplish their work. The ASUM student voice is similarly protected. We are simply asking for equitable treatment.

We serve as Staff Senators because we are motivated, proactive employees who love UM and want to help it succeed. It is incredibly demoralizing to be told that if we want Staff Senate to continue, it is expected that we fill this position with volunteers. Part of Staff Senate's mission is "to facilitate communication and cooperation between the administration and the staff of the University of Montana." We ask that you affirm your commitment to the same and continue the institutional support of Staff Senate.

Sincerely,

Staff Senate Executive Officers

Cc: Rosi Keller, Interim Vice President for Administration & Finance
Braden Fitzgerald, President, Associated Students of the University of Montana
Mary-Ann Bowman, President, Faculty Senate