

Press Release

Ohio University's AAUP and AFSCME custodial workers organize rally this Wednesday to demand a #FiringFreeze

(Athens, Ohio – May 4, 2020) OHIO University's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, "OU-AAUP," and AFSCME custodial workers have joined forces to demand a "Firing Freeze" at OHIO during a socially distanced motorcade rally this Wednesday from 5-6pm.

Last week, Ohio University laid off 140 AFSCME custodial workers. At least three Instructional Faculty members were told in no uncertain terms that they were being laid off. And in an unprecedented move, pre-tenure Assistant Professors in multiple departments were told to prepare for layoffs, with one directly told he had been laid off. The full extent of layoffs thus far remains unclear due to the administration's evasiveness, but Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) and African American Studies were clearly targeted.

AFSCME custodial workers and OU-AAUP's call for a "Firing Freeze" encompasses three demands: (1) halt all layoffs for the duration of the pandemic, (2) reinstate of those who were laid off during the pandemic, and (3) cap all OHIO salaries at Governor DeWine's (\$153,650) for the duration of the pandemic.

Participants will convene in the Ohio University football stadium parking lot (Peden lot) at 5pm. At 5:30pm, they will proceed up to College Green, taking South Green Drive to West Union Street up to the intersection with Court St. They will circle the green for approximately 30 minutes.

OHIO's top ten earners in 2019 together earned \$3,872,578.00, not including President Nellis' vehicle stipend and housing. This is in the context of Athens County, the poorest county in Ohio nestled in the foothills of rural Appalachia. The median annual salary of an Instructional Faculty member is \$54,000; the median income for the county is \$37,778.

On December 9, OU-AAUP sent its initial request to President Nellis to immediately and publicly announce a commitment to retain Instructional Faculty. He never responded. On March 2, OU-AAUP wrote to President Nellis demanding "a public commitment to halt further non-renewals of Instructional Faculty." No such commitment was made, and OU-AAUP unleashed a public awareness campaign about professor layoffs in a context of continued administrative bloat. Students, alumni, and community members contacted President Nellis, the Board of Trustees, and elected officials with their concerns, and thousands signed a petition to halt professor layoffs.

On March 25, President Nellis announced via email that, in the context of the pandemic, he had "asked University leadership to pause the personnel-related budget reductions." Nothing could make it plainer that the "pause" has ended than the termination of 140 custodial worker jobs on International Workers Day. The Nellis administration is using the pandemic as cover to justify sweeping personnel cuts that will fundamentally devalue our educational mission and endanger our community in Southeast Ohio. AFSCME custodial workers and OU-AAUP are ready to fight. OU-AAUP can be reached at ou.aaup@gmail.com.