

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 13, 2021

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Samuel L. Stanley, Jr., M.D.  
President, Michigan State University

**From:** Women's Advisory Committee for Support Staff (WACSS)

**Subject:** Continuing to provide pandemic support for MSU's Support Staff

We understand that navigating the pandemic has been a unique leadership challenge for MSU, and we appreciate your ongoing efforts to help us push through this crisis. The Women's Advisory Committee for Support Staff (WACSS) would like to bring to your attention the needs and struggles of MSU support staff, particularly our women employees. While we recognize the experiences and hardships of other employees on campus, we have been charged to represent and advocate on behalf of support staff; therefore, it remains imperative to share the experiences of these valued employees.

For over a year, support staff have been asked to do more, endure more, cope more, and be more—all while resources have dwindled. Our committee has received reports of—and members are personally aware of—support staff who are burnt out, exhausted, and fearful of taking time off because they believe it will increase their chances of being furloughed or laid off. While maintaining the essential functions of the university, support staff experience ongoing challenges including, but not limited to:

- Being left out of communications on university status and operating plans while dreading being furloughed, which has been heard from all levels across all unions.
- Working onsite and being subjected to increasingly restrictive working environments (e.g. closed kitchens/cafeterias, unavailable water fountains, and limited or no access to personal wellness spaces).
- Working remotely for the first time in their careers while dealing with the stress of trying to keep “business as usual,” when even the simplest tasks are no longer usual.
- Women in labor unions struggling with physical and emotional burdens, and having to leave their positions to fulfill essential needs in their personal lives. In some cases, these vacated positions were filled.
- Increased workloads due to transferred duties of furloughed, laid off, and transitioned employees and the hiring chill.



### Women's Advisory Committee for Support Staff

Michigan State University  
Hannah Administration Building  
426 Auditorium Road, Room 444  
East Lansing, Michigan 48824

Phone: 517.355.5014  
Email: [wacss@msu.edu](mailto:wacss@msu.edu)  
[wacss.msu.edu](http://wacss.msu.edu)

- Wellness breaks not being offered to support staff like they were offered to faculty and students.
- Being forced to maintain the former, non-flexible hours (e.g. 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) despite the global crisis, and with the added challenges of managing shared “office space” with partners, children, and/or pets.

To address these challenges, we offer the following suggestions for your consideration:

- Speak **directly** to the support staff; listen to and acknowledge their unique contributions and sacrifices to keep MSU running. Consider adding or increasing the frequency of town halls, videos, emails, letters, or similar that are created and disseminated for a solely support staff audience.
- Send clear direction to supervisors and managers to provide support to their employees, disseminate information in a timely manner to all support staff members, assist in removing barriers, and reassure employees that taking leave time will not jeopardize their job status.
- Consider acknowledging staff’s service in support of MSU by declaring MSU days of rest/wellness for **all** staff through additional paid leave or declared paid holidays.
- Continue to work with community and government partners to expedite access to the COVID vaccine for essential on-site workers and the entirety of MSU’s workforce. Doing so will help remove obstacles and ease the burden of under-staffed and under-resourced departments and functions at MSU.

The past year has been particularly challenging for MSU, but through the hard work, dedication, and intense efforts of every staff member, faculty member, and leader of the MSU community we have not only survived, but thrived in some ways. We hope you will consider our recommendations above to especially acknowledge the contributions made by support staff, who keep the university running 24/7/365 and embody the spirit of Spartans Will.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you for MSU.

Kind regards,

Women’s Advisory Committee for Support Staff (WACSS)

cc: Jabbar Bennett, Sharon Butler, Barbara Roberts