

SC 260

LaNora Tolman, Executive Officer
 Phone: (907) 450-8042
 Fax: (907) 450-8041
 Email: latolman@alaska.edu



UNIVERSITY
 of ALASKA
Many Traditions One Alaska

Attachment 260-6

106C Butrovich Building
 910 Yukon Drive
 P.O. Box 757780
 Fairbanks, AK 99775-7780

System Governance Office

Staff Alliance

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 23, 2015

TO: R. Erik Seastedt, Chief Human Resources Officer

FROM: Monique Musick, Chair 

RE: Response to the Final UA Furlough Regulation

We are deeply troubled by the changes to the UA Furlough Regulations that occurred after our governance review and before the final signature, most particularly the deletion of the Limits to Furlough section. This change substantially impacts staff, and reflects a serious issue in the governance process at the University of Alaska.

Staff Alliance was pleased to work in partnership with the administration in crafting the furlough regulations, and believed that this partnership would strengthen our relationship and result in the meaningful involvement of staff in the crafting of policy and regulation. We still believe that there is a place in this process for partnering during the development of policy and regulation, and believe that such partnership will result in better policies and clearer communication.

However, in this case the governance review process appears to have been seriously compromised. The draft regulation was sent to an individual member of Staff Alliance for review in mid-December, with a deadline for feedback of January 5. Thirty days is a short period for full and thoughtful review, comment, and compilation of a formal response on behalf of staff throughout the UA System; when coupled with the holiday closure, this timeline was especially discouraging. We appreciated the ability to extend the deadline for feedback, and compiled and shared comments from our universities. We believed that our involvement in the crafting of draft regulations and our feedback during review resulted in regulations that would be the best manageable in a bleak budgetary situation, that were as fair as possible, and that gave staff needed information so they could adapt.

We were surprised to find significant changes to the regulations when they were signed, changes that were made without consultation or even the courtesy of an explanation. In fact, if we had not reviewed the final regulation and compared it to the earlier version shared with us, we would not have known that an important protection had been stripped. Our representatives, who dedicated time and energy to the crafting of these regulations and reported that the process was cooperative and respectful, were not informed that a key section they advocated for had been deleted.

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Should there have been any reason to doubt that this section would become a part of the final regulations, Staff Alliance would have provided a formal response outlining the need for a limit to furloughs. A limit on the length of a prospective furlough is responsible; it ensures that UA's response to budgetary struggles is strategic; it provides staff with critical information about how much they can expect to lose in pay in a worst, case scenario. Just as the University struggles to plan for the next fiscal year while the legislative budget process proceeds, staff are struggling to determine what changes we'll need to make to balance our household budgets.

It is important to recognize that even in the recent emergency changes to layoff regulations, which did not require formal governance review, we received a response from the administration outlining those areas where the adopted regulations differed from our preferred options. While the final product was still concerning, that step did close the communication loop and let us know that our opinions had been heard.

While the furlough regulations have been signed and adopted formally, we believe it is important to express our deep concern over the approach taken. If the University of Alaska is committed to shared-governance, we must do a better job of valuing governance input and communicating when our positions do not align. We look forward to building a stronger, more consistent, and ultimately more respectful process for shared-governance.

cc: Pat Gamble, President

Dan White, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research