Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.

I am Barbara Madeloni, president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. I am here today to draw your attention to positions taken by the UMass administration in contract negotiations with faculty and staff that the MTA believes to be egregious and unfair.

And I am here to ask that you, as the stewards of our university system, use your considerable influence to see that these stands are changed so that we can find a smooth path to agreements that are fair to everyone on our campuses. Indeed, only if that happens will all of us truly be serving the interests of the thousands of students who depend on us to provide a first-rate education.

Our public university system is one of the finest in the country. I know that firsthand because I am both a product of UMass Amherst and a proud UMass Amherst faculty member.

I have had the honor of working with faculty colleagues whose commitment to students and to advancing knowledge in their fields is unmatched. Moreover, as both a student and a faculty member, I have benefited time and again from the hard work and commitment of the staff who maintain our physical plant, oversee our residence halls and schedule our courses.

Working together, our dedicated faculty and staff accomplish the hundreds of essential things that create the possibilities for students to live and learn in vibrant, supportive communities.

The legislative victory of the fifty-fifty plan to help with student access is an indication of the state’s ongoing commitment to public higher education. I appreciate and applaud that commitment. But I also know that the success of the initiative is due in no small part to the efforts of faculty and staff, working with the administration, to secure the funding we need to grow and maintain our university system.

From across the state, campus employees in every position organized to move the plan forward, just as they have always been eager allies of the administration in fighting for adequate funding – and for every other step required to ensure that UMass is an institution in which collaboration and inquiry serve as a foundation for students to grow and succeed.
So it leaves me confused when I learn that administrators within the university are aggressively demanding givebacks from the very people who build and hold together our university system – many of whom are our lowest-paid workers.

I am stunned that administrators could fail to understand that the strength of this institution we all love so much rests on the working people who – in each task, in each interaction with students and colleagues – knit together the community that allows for learning and engagement.

I am also outraged.

I cannot fathom how anyone could not comprehend that support, economic security and respect for all employees are essential to the health of our university.

Campus unions are continuing to negotiate in good faith, but we can no longer stomach punitive, regressive and counterproductive demands. I urge you in the strongest possible terms, as leaders of the system, to call on UMass administrators to immediately retract their aggressive giveback proposals and come to the table and the community with appropriate offers.

All of us deserve proposals acknowledging that the strength of our university system rests on unions and the administration working together, as we have done in the past, in relationships of mutual trust and respect. And we will stand together until such proposals form the basis of our discussions, allowing us to jointly seek what is best for our students and our campuses.

Thank you for your time.