Donna Johnson to UMass Trustees

September 17, 2014

Good Morning members of the Board, Chancellors, President Caret, and distinguished guests,

My name is Donna Johnson and I represent the 1000 clerical and technical workers at U Mass Amherst. I am also chair of the MTA’s Higher Ed Leadership Council and standing here with me today are some colleagues who were not afforded the opportunity to speak, Janelle Quarles, who has some petitions to give you and Henry Cornu. We stand before you today to let you know that we are mad as hell and we are not going to take it anymore.

As some of the lowest paid workers we feel that the current regressive proposals are unacceptable and extremely classist. Asking my members to give back to the university so you look good to your auditors or potential lenders is unfair and we are asking you to reconsider these proposals. You may feel that you are asking for minor concessions. But the university’s proposals are in fact devastating in terms of our compensation and professional standing. Those of us who work on our campuses see wasteful spending all of the time. Just ask us, we’ll show you where to look when savings are needed.

We are asking for an equitable package for all of our members, not a package that harms the lowest paid employees. Not all of us are as fortunate as those of you I address today, some of us work 2-3 jobs just to survive. One would think that an education institution like ours would strive to provide a vehicle to close the gap between the social classes. A rising tide lifts all boats and I would hope the university would want to invest in their workforce and be the leaders for the rest of our Commonwealth. The University’s mission statement states in part “The University’s mission is to provide an affordable and accessible education of high quality and to conduct programs of research and public service that advance knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world.” Are we not people of the Commonwealth and shouldn’t our lives be improved.

We understand that the goal is to make higher education affordable and accessible to all, after all without students there would be no need for us. What we don’t understand is how and why it has to be done by harming the hard working dedicated employees who come to work day after day for the students?

It is our hope today that you will hear our message loud and clear and that you will reconsider this attack on your employees. Do the right thing and withdraw these harmful proposals. Thank you for your time.