



We are writing to update you on **HUCTW’s discussions with Harvard administrators to prevent pay loss and job cuts among HUCTW members.**

In their message to staff on May 5, senior Harvard officials stated that in order to address losses caused by the fallout of COVID-19, it would be necessary to enact additional cost reductions, possibly “including layoffs or furloughs.” Following these statements, we have had hundreds of conversations with members across campus about their serious concerns and creative ideas around preventing and mitigating furloughs and job losses.

To be clear, no COVID-19 furloughs or layoffs have been discussed with HUCTW or implemented to date in any school or department at Harvard. However, it is apparent from the University’s own communications and reports from members, that furloughs, and possibly layoffs, are being seriously considered as a potential next step.

HUCTW leaders strongly oppose the push to move forward with furloughs or layoffs and we are calling on our members, colleagues, and friends in the community to work together to find less harmful ways to resolve our University’s challenges.

In their most recent message, Harvard leaders stated the University would “make every effort to limit the extent of any workforce actions.” From our discussions, we believe that Harvard leaders want to avoid layoffs and furloughs. That was the primary reason that Harvard made the principled decision to continue to pay all staff across the University through June 28.

However, we also believe that top administrators appear to be rushing to move ahead with potential furloughs and layoffs without knowing or presenting all of the necessary facts to HUCTW and the wider community, and without exploring all reasonable options to avoid furloughs and layoffs and protect the most vulnerable among us.

An Incomplete Financial Picture

As we mentioned in [earlier letters](#), we have been meeting once a week or more with key University representatives. Although Harvard officials continue to be willing to meet and have provided us with some important relevant data, we have serious concerns that University leaders are moving too quickly towards furloughs and layoffs without considering a complete picture of the problems Harvard and its schools are facing.

Although the University has published two significant numbers (predictions that Harvard will take in \$415 million less in revenue in fiscal year 2020, and \$750 million less in revenue in fiscal year 2021), senior administrators have not yet shared a complete analysis of the full financial impact.

University leaders have described cost-saving measures, including “salary freezes for all faculty and exempt staff, a University-wide hiring freeze, deferring or cancelling all discretionary spending, a review of all capital projects to determine which ones can be deferred, and voluntary salary reductions for senior leadership.” During the statewide lockdown and campus closure, Harvard has also clearly been saving money on expenses such as healthcare costs and energy use. **But we have not yet seen specific information about the extent to which these significant cost-saving measures and trends can be expected to offset the predicted revenue loss.**

We also have yet to see how, once the impacts are fully analyzed, these broader financial losses are going to affect local schools and departments. Many schools and departments are still in the middle of a process of revising budgets for FY2021, and different sections of the University have different levels of reliance on particular streams of revenue.

There has been no public discussion that would allow Harvard citizens to understand all the alternative possibilities that exist for reducing non-personnel costs, or to explore the potential for relying on reserves to support short-term deficit spending. **How can the university know how many furloughs and layoffs are necessary, or if they are necessary at all, when University and school leaders are still in the process of developing a complete analysis of the financial picture and budgets have not been prepared for the new fiscal year?** Why would Harvard move forward with potentially devastating cuts to pay or jobs when they don’t yet know the complete scope of the financial problems they are trying to solve?

An Equitably Shared Burden

University leaders’ communications mentioned that some of Harvard’s top executives are opting to take voluntary pay cuts, but these letters do not describe any mandatory pay cuts for senior leaders and Harvard’s other highly-paid executives. And yet the University is clearly indicating that mandatory furloughs or layoffs for union and non-union staff are a likely next step. **If Harvard moves forward with salary cuts, Harvard’s highly-paid administrators and faculty (of which there are many) should shoulder the primary burden, not lesser-paid staff.**

HUCTW members are middle-to-low income earners, many of whom are unable to accumulate savings for emergencies, let alone for future planning. The average member earns \$61,000 per year and our lowest-paid staff earn less than \$35,000 for full-time work. A three-month furlough could result in a loss of more than \$15,000 for a typical HUCTW member; a six-month furlough would be a loss of more than \$30,000 for the year. Although the US Congress has temporarily enhanced unemployment benefits, after July 31 unemployment insurance will only replace 50% of income lost. For our typical members, this could have devastating effects on their lives and their families; and for our lowest income earners, it will

likely have catastrophic effects. **Harvard's highest-paid administrators and faculty can bear this burden without significant pain; our members cannot.**

An Urgent Call for Partnership

As we mentioned in our [last update for members](#), HUCTW leaders expect that negotiations around furloughs or layoffs will involve discussions with key decision-makers at the school or department level. And based on University communications and reports from members and friends in local departments, we expect these conversations to start very soon.

We know that local leaders care about the staff who work in their departments and don't want to see job losses either. But in order to honor these staff, key decision-makers at all levels must commit to fully engage with HUCTW leaders and union members to explore every possible option to avoid furloughs and layoffs, as well as work seriously to mitigate the impact of any potential cuts on moderate-to-low income earners.

Harvard staff are not peripheral to the University's core mission. Teaching, learning, and research at Harvard could not occur without the integral contributions of staff at every level. As University administrators said in their May 5 communication to staff members: "We recognize that Harvard is its people. We are grateful for the countless ways each of you contributes to the important work of this institution. In all we do, we will be guided by our goal to protect the well-being and security of our workforce as we manage through these unprecedented times."

This is a highly commendable statement but University and school officials need to support these powerful words with commensurate actions:

Harvard should not rush into making devastating cuts like furloughs or layoffs. University leaders, school leaders, and the Harvard community do not yet have a complete financial picture of the University's losses and gains.

Once the complete financial picture is understood, University and school leaders need to work together with HUCTW leaders and members to earnestly explore every potential alternative to furloughs and layoffs.

If these types of pay reductions move forward, the financial pain needs to be shared equitably based on who can withstand the most financial loss, with higher paid executives and faculty bearing the majority of the burden, not moderately paid staff.

University and school officials have the chance, in these complex and difficult times, to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to compassionate leadership, engaging sincerely with HUCTW leaders to find fair and thoughtful solutions to Harvard's financial concerns together.

As noted above, there have not yet been any specific proposals for furloughs or layoffs shared with HUCTW leaders from any school or department, and we continue to work hard every day to save jobs and avoid pay losses. We are strongly committed to ongoing communication and engagement with HUCTW members about challenges that we expect will begin to arise in some units in the coming weeks. Now more than ever, please share your questions, ideas, and concerns by talking with a Union leader you work with regularly, or write or call HUCTW at huctw.info@huctw.org or 617-661-8289.