

August 6, 2021

The Honorable Peter B. Harckham
New York State Senator, 40th District
1 Park Place, Suite #302
Peekskill, NY 10566

Dear Senator Harckham,

I write in response to your letter from July 21, 2021 regarding Mercy College's ongoing negotiations with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which our adjunct faculty selected to represent them for collective bargaining. I'm concerned that you appear to have made certain determinations about the College after hearing allegations from unnamed adjuncts but without troubling yourself to hear Mercy's response to those allegations. I don't know of any more basic principle than that of hearing from both sides before making such determinations.

The College entered into negotiations with our adjunct union with a willingness to listen, give serious consideration, and respond thoughtfully to any ideas, proposals, and supporting arguments that they may present. We have a long history of working collaboratively and amicably with our staff union. Since bargaining commenced in October 2019, we have held regular bargaining sessions, even during the COVID pandemic. We exchanged proposals on nearly 30 topics and have reached agreement on half of them. This is typically a lengthy process – most first contracts take over a year to negotiate and many take several years. You may be familiar with the lengthy course that negotiations took between Pace University and its adjunct union.

While we continue to make good progress toward reaching an overall contract, there are still many topics on which the parties remain far apart in our positions, including issues of compensation and appointments.

After careful study and analysis, the College presented a wage proposal at our most recent bargaining session, in early May 2021, that is competitive with the national and regional marketplaces. At the time our adjunct union was formed, an influx of new students from the College of New Rochelle allowed Mercy College to increase its adjunct salaries by over 35% in a single stroke. These raises didn't match our wealthier university peers like Fordham or our public peers, which are subsidized by the state or New York City. But they were fully comparable to adjunct salaries paid by most of our private college peers. Now we are proposing continued future pay increases for adjunct faculty at the same rate as those for our full-time faculty members, as well as a fee if a course they are scheduled to teach is canceled. The parties

remain far apart on this issue, however, because the Union is proposing drastic wage increases of up to 125% more than their current earnings.

The College has the utmost respect and appreciation for the important role our adjunct faculty members play in the fabric of our institution. Yet, we cannot agree to proposals that are outside the norm for institutions of higher education or that would jeopardize Mercy College's mission of providing an exceptional education to students while maintaining our low tuition price point and solid financial position.

Please be assured that the College remains committed to bargaining in a good-faith effort to resolve our differences with SEIU and to reaching an overall collective bargaining agreement as soon as possible that maintains compensation levels and general working conditions that are competitive with those of our private college peer institutions. In fact, since our last session on May 3, 2021, the SEIU has rejected proposed dates to continue bargaining and only recently agreed to resume bargaining at the end of August; the College is eager to continue our conversations.

Sincerely,

Timothy L. Hall
President