



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

May 22, 2018

President Ana Mari Cauce
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

Dear President Cauce,

As you likely already heard, yesterday the Seattle City Council unanimously adopted a resolution that I sponsored, affirming “that all workers in Seattle, including academic student employees (ASE’s) at the University of Washington (UW), should be paid a living wage” and calling on you and the rest of UW leadership “to reach a fair and equitable contract agreement with the members of UAW Local 4121 that addresses ASE concerns about pay, fees, and affordability at UW.”

I trust that you and your leadership recognize the seriousness of the situation which has led the City Council to weigh in on your collective bargaining negotiations. It is a clear signal that many people in the city are watching with concern for how you manage these negotiations.

The City Council voted Monday afternoon after hearing from several UAW members who movingly described the challenges of academic student employees at UW. They described how, in spite of their long working hours, they find it difficult to pay their rent, with paltry paychecks further reduced by university fees, which is akin to wage theft. As an elected representative of Seattle’s working people, I am trying to square the university’s professed values with the reality of the ASE’s having to scrimp on food and other basic necessities, and their overall precarious circumstances.

A remedying of these conditions is essential both for the UAW members themselves, and for working people as a whole. The research and teaching assistants, graders, and tutors in the UAW do essential work advancing scientific and humanistic knowledge. Their work contributes to the ecological sustainability, social justice, and development of Seattle and the region. And it is their dedication and creativity that the university’s world-class reputation rests on, as part of the work of all faculty, staff and students. Yet these same academic student employees are finding it difficult to afford to live in Seattle on the paychecks you provide.

There is no question that Seattle faces an acute housing crisis for working people. While the problem is systemic and not limited to one employer or neighborhood, all leading organizations in the city, including UW, must step up to solve the problem. Just last week, the Seattle City Council, recognizing the severity of the housing crisis, instituted a new tax on Amazon and other big businesses to fund affordable housing and services for those most in need. For some of my colleagues this may have been a difficult decision, but they recognized the need to act.

You, too, have the responsibility to step up and address the urgent housing needs that your academic student employees face. You can take steps in that direction immediately, by agreeing to a contract that waives all fees, provides good pay raises and secure healthcare, and assures these workers the equity and workplace protections they fully deserve.

Sincerely,

Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant