



# City of Seattle

---



May 22, 2018

On May 17th, the Seattle LGBTQ Commission voted on a position of support for UAW 4121's bargaining efforts on behalf of Academic Student Employees (ASEs) at the University of Washington. We applaud the UAW bargaining team for being inclusive and intersectional in their demands. We are pleased in particular to see that the recent healthcare counter-proposals by University of Washington have already included expanded options for trans-inclusive healthcare and mental health coverage. At the same time, we urge the University of Washington to agree to a proposal that provides living wages in addition to inclusive benefits for ASEs.

As a commission we support all parties being at the table for this effort including the workers, administration, healthcare providers, insurance providers and brokerages, the University of Washington Alumni Association and students. As a group, all of these parties are the solution to providing LGBTQ+ workers the trans-inclusive medical coverage and mental health coverage that should come with working for one of the largest educational institutions in the nation.

We also encourage the University of Washington to maintain tuition benefits for any working student at the University of Washington. If a student is selected to teach their peers, this shows a level of understanding of the subject matter that benefits not only students but also the institution.

When large employers like University of Washington pay substandard wages, it has a profound impact on the surrounding community. ASEs' base rate of pay currently necessitates either additional jobs (which degrades the educational experience for undergraduates) or going on public assistance to survive in Seattle. Given that the current raise schedule does not keep up with cost of living increases, this problem will only get worse.

As stated in a recent report by the Social Justice Sexuality Project<sup>1</sup>:

*As a result of systemic discrimination and inequity, LGBTQ people—especially those who are people of color, transgender, and/or gender nonconforming—are more likely to need access to public benefits such as social security benefits, disability benefits, SNAP benefits, and public housing. Ironically, application and eligibility requirements, coupled with discriminatorily applied discretion on the part of enrollment officers, means that these benefits are out of reach for some of the people who need them most.*

Paying ASEs wages that require them to go on public assistance therefore has a direct impact on the funds available for low-income LGBTQ+ individuals and families. Especially considering how critical ASEs are to the UW education, it is unacceptable that the base wages for these employees are set up in such a way to require taxpayers to additionally subsidize them at the expense of those struggling for other structural reasons.

In summation, we wholly support inclusion of trans-inclusive and mental health coverage as well as reforms to harassment and discrimination policies as part of the UAW 4121 collective bargaining process, but we urge UW to come to the table with good-faith counter-proposals on wages that reflect the reality of the high cost of living in Seattle.

Sincerely,

The Seattle LGBTQ Commission

---

<sup>1</sup> "Intersecting Injustice: A National Call to Action Addressing LGBTQ Poverty and Economic Justice for All" by The Social Justice Sexuality Project, March 2018.  
[http://socialjusticesexuality.com/intersecting\\_injustice/](http://socialjusticesexuality.com/intersecting_injustice/)