

June 1, 2023

Ana Marie Cauce, President
Professor of Psychology
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Dear President Cauce,

As faculty across UW who supervise postdocs, we write to express our views in light of the May 16, 2023 letter from Washington State Labor and Industries Director Joel Sacks regarding Postdoc wages. **We respectfully urge you to agree to keep Postdoc salaries above the state wage thresholds.**

Director Sacks' letter leaves no ambiguity as to the eligibility of Postdocs under the Washington Minimum Wage Act (WMWA): we must pay Postdocs according to the minimum salary standards defined by law. **Most postdocs are paid from our grants, putting us in the strongest position to appreciate the pressure these high wage standards put on our research budgets. We are also best positioned to understand the ways in which making postdocs overtime eligible would negatively impact our work at UW.** The views of faculty principal investigators should be strongly considered in the contract negotiations.

Higher wages create a more inclusive and sustainable scientific industry and are needed to continue to attract talented scientists, who must be able to afford to live here. In addition, paying less than the WMWA minimum salary to make Postdocs eligible for overtime is inconsistent with the role of Postdocs as trainees. If their training requires over 40 hours/week, then limiting them to 40 hours/week compromises their training and reduces PIs effectiveness as mentors. Tracking Postdoc hours is not compatible with how research is done. Research does not stick to a clock that allows a trainee to leave at an arbitrary time. Tracking hours would increase the administrative burden for postdocs, PIs, and departments, as postdocs typically spend many hours reading and thinking about their work "on their own time," and they are often on-call outside typical work hours for consultation with other lab personnel, such as students. Tracking hours would further exacerbate the power imbalance between postdocs and PIs, who may pressure Postdocs to work overtime without reporting extra hours. Finally, making Postdocs overtime eligible would not save money, as working as few as 2.6 hours of overtime per week would bring a Postdoc's salary up to the threshold required by the WMWA to make Postdocs overtime exempt. In summary, we agree with your March 31st letter to the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries in which you state that "The fluctuating demands of postdoc training experiences are inconsistent with the application and feasibility of predicting and paying overtime, since eligibility for overtime is assessed on a weekly basis and averaging hours over two or more weeks is not permitted. To make the most of their immersive learning environments, postdocs require the flexibility to pursue opportunities as they present

themselves, unconstrained by time limits, and to follow their passion for answering research questions in a manner inspired by mission, not by time of day or hours invested.”

In your letter to Director Sacks, you expressed concern that higher wages for Postdocs would make UW a “startling outlier” among research universities and that higher wages will “hurt research competitiveness.” We understand this concern, however another way to view this is that we would become leaders of living wages in science, and willing partners in demanding that federal research funding increases to keep pace with us.

We welcome additional conversation with you as well as stakeholders from the state (copied here). Thank you as always for your service and support.

Sincerely,

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Andres Barria, Professor, Physiology and Biophysics
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cc: Max Friedfeld, Recording Secretary, UAW Local 4121 on behalf of the UAW Local 4121's
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