

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bristol Community College trustees refuse to meet with faculty

The Bristol Community College Board of Trustees refused to allow members of the faculty union to address the impact of recent layoffs during the board's meeting scheduled for today (Monday, May 11).

Members of BCC's Massachusetts Community College Council chapter planned to present a petition with more than 550 signatures calling for the college to halt the layoffs, which affected more than 130 employees.

Board of Trustees Chair Joan Medeiros wrote to the MCCC saying that the board will not be having public comments during their meetings now being held online. The MCCC pointed out that every aspect of the college's work — from delivering courses to meetings among colleagues — is happening online.

In the statement she prepared to deliver to the board, MCCC chapter president Paulette Howarth said, "Tutors, library staff, advising staff, and admissions placement testing staff were deemed 'expendable,' even though virtually everyone who was targeted for layoff worked directly with our students and provided vital support for success for this term and beyond. It's immoral to leave our students without the help they need and have come to rely on."

Both the AFSCME local, which represents staff at the college, and BCC's Faculty and Professional Staff Senate voiced support for the MCCC in its attempt to have campus leaders reverse the devastating job losses.

The Bristol chapter of MCCC notes that even after the layoffs, BCC President Laura Douglas said in an email to the entire college that the college was in very good financial health. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic forced colleges to shift to remote learning and experience revenue losses, BCC has received more than \$4 million from federal emergency stimulus legislation.

Political leaders, including U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey have made clear that federal CARES Act money is to be used to protect jobs and to support students.

The MCCC further criticized the college for the way in which it gutted staff.

“These decisions were made at the highest level of the organization — without consulting the direct supervisors of those impacted. It has come to light that some of the individuals were laid off based on inaccurate coding in the payroll system that indicated they were not working remotely. This is absolutely false in many cases,” Howarth said in the remarks she planned to deliver to the board. “The issue is that the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Human Resources made the decision that disrupted countless lives, without conducting even minimal diligence or following basic management principles of informing the supervisors. This is just one more example of the disconnect between Administration and those working at the college, even those in supervisory roles.”

This is not the first time the board has declined to listen to faculty and staff concerns. The union requested time to speak in the April meeting and the chair put them off until today’s meeting, when they were once again denied an audience despite requesting time with 72 hours’ advance notice as per the trustees’ bylaws.

Community colleges will be integral to the state’s economic recovery. Maintaining proper staffing levels and securing sufficient funding from federal sources and appropriations from the state will be key to ensuring students have access to the education that they need and that the quality of that education will not be compromised by poor decisions being made now.

“This is our time to step up and be there for those in need. We cannot do that effectively if we are scaled to the bone and eliminating vital support services for students,” Howarth said. “The difference of whether a student succeeds or drops out is often traced back to one or two relationships with faculty or staff who really cared and supported that student when it was most needed.”