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September 13, 2016

Dr. Katherine S. Newman
Office of the Provost
University of Massachusetts
373 Whitmore Administration Building
181 President's Drive
Amherst, MA 01003

Dear Provost Newman,

We are writing this letter on behalf of the Board of Directors and Labor Studies Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), one of the oldest and most respected social science organizations in the country, in response to several appeals from members to join them in urging the University of Massachusetts to restore funds to the Labor Center that have been cut in recent years, including funds for graduate students and part-time faculty. Without this funding, students from working-class families cannot enroll in the program and by denying this support, UMass fails in its mission to provide all students, regardless of financial means, a quality education in labor studies. This is an especially acute failing for a public institution.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst, as a public land-grant institution, has a responsibility to provide access and opportunities for all people, while demonstrating our commitment to inclusion of historically underrepresented groups. We believe that a culturally diverse campus is integral to academic excellence and that our students, faculty, and staff should reflect the diverse world in which we live.

While diversity typically refers to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, historically the children of the working-class have been among the underrepresented in higher education, and given the relationship between race/ethnicity and class, the institution's failure to provide students with limited means with the funds to pursue a graduate degree in labor studies is likely to affect even more adversely members of these racial and ethnic groups.

In a letter dated September 3, 2016, Dean John Hird assured everyone that the Labor Center has the full support of the university and the Department of Sociology, and that the future of the Center is "very bright." While his assurance is most welcomed, the letter does not address the elimination of funds for teaching and research assistantships. While the Dean is optimistic regarding the revenue-generating Union Leadership and Administration (ULA) residency program, and we applaud efforts to strengthen the program, the failure to restore funds for the assistantships and part-time faculty casts doubt on the institution's commitment to the Labor Center. While it may be true that the Center is not on the chopping block per se, programs like this have experienced death by a thousand cuts in other parts of the country.

On another, but related issue, concerns were expressed to us regarding Eve Weinbam's termination as the Director of the Center. While we are hesitant as a rule to weigh in on personnel issues, we urge the University to allow the faculty affiliated with the center to have a strong voice in the selection of the Director. Both Tom Juravich, currently serving as the interim director, and Eve Weinbaum, enjoy the respect of labor and labor studies communities. The Center will be in good hands with either at the helm, but that is not the issue for us. Rather, the issue for the SSSP is shared governance, which over the years has been undermined by policies that have shifted power away from faculty to administrators in areas where faculty traditionally have played a strong, if not decisive role. Hopefully it will be the faculty who selects the permanent director. But regardless of who is in the position, it will not matter very much if s/he does not receive the full support of the institution. The immediate restoration of the assistantships and adjunct positions would be an important first step toward demonstrating *clearly* institutional support for the Center.

In the Labor Center's prestigious 52 year history, hundreds of union activists, leaders, and staff have graduated from the program. About one thousand Labor Center alumni have dedicated themselves to the labor movement and there is no doubt that workers, and thereby the country, have benefitted from a strong labor movement. In fact, the decline in union membership and power in the last 40-50 years has contributed substantially to a level of inequality that we have not seen since the early 1900s. There has never been a more important time to support a Center of this kind, not only for the good of workers, but for the well-being of Society. The negative effects of inequality go much farther than individuals' ability to take care of their families. Labor Centers play an essential role in giving voice to the concerns of workers and helping to shape policies that contribute to a more equitable and just society. We urge UMass to be a model for other institutions by taking the lead in supporting these programs. In closing, we would like to remind you of the university's mission, as stated in *Trustee Document T05-024*.

To provide an affordable and accessible education of high quality and to conduct programs of research and public service that advance knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world.

Restoring the teaching and research assistantships for students of modest means is certainly one way to provide an affordable and accessible education to those who could not otherwise afford it. Restoring the part-time positions or adding full-time positions will allow you to provide students with a higher quality education than you can provide without them. These steps, and restoring the Director's position to a 12-month appointment, will allow you to more easily and effectively "conduct programs of research and public service that advance knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world." We trust that the Center will be a priority for UMass-Amherst, reflected in the funding and other forms of support it receives.

Sincerely,



Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.
Executive Officer



Donileen R. Loseke, University of South Florida
SSSP President, 2016-2017

Cc: Dean John Hird, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Dr. Michelle Budig, Chair, Department of Sociology