July 3, 2011

Dear Honorable Members of the New Jersey State Legislature:

The Governor has reneged on an already “austere” February budget plan which held financial support to New Jersey Higher Education flat at 2010 levels. We are the leaders of the American Federation of Teachers New Jersey (AFT NJSF/AFL-CIO), the New Jersey Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and the Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE/AFT-AFLCIO), and represent 30,000 Higher education faculty members, librarians, staff, mental health clinicians, research scientists, pharmacists and other professionals. **We urge you to override Governor Christie’s line item vetoes and help him to live up to the prior funding commitments he previously articulated and reiterated to Higher Education.**

Governor Christie cut over $55 million in tuition assistance grants (TAG, NJ Stars and EOF) from what he proposed in February, guaranteeing that some students and families will not be able to afford college or stay in school, and others will be financially squeezed harder than ever. One out of every three full-time college students in New Jersey needs these grants to make ends meet.

Incredibly, the Governor has also decided to cut fringe benefits funding for 1,244 Higher Education jobs and millions of dollars in facilities, research and academic program support. Students are likely to face increases in tuition as colleges and universities try to cover costs. This will also coincide with decreases in the quality of education due to fewer faculty, fewer programs, and larger class sizes.

New Jersey has a dismal record in supporting Higher Education. While Governor Christie admits that the State has done a “lousy” job, he has done nothing concrete to correct the situation.

- New Jersey ranks 46th in its funding higher education.
- The State share of college budgets has dropped from 48% in 1990 to 15% today.
- Due to limited enrollment capacity, the State is not meeting the Higher Education needs of its citizens. New Jersey rejects 75% of residents who apply to State schools, ranks 45th in higher education enrollment, and 50th in the number of high school students it can accommodate in public colleges.
- New Jersey is falling behind in affordability. Because of the lack of funding three of our NJ public universities are among the most expensive in the nation and one is among those with the fastest growing tuition.
The Governor's planned cuts in Higher Education will place a heavy financial burden on those who can least afford it -- students and their families. How can these cuts be justified when at the same time the Governor is banking $640 million dollars in unspent State revenue to create the largest budget surplus in thirty years? Despite his statements of being an avid supporter of public Higher Education, the Governor’s budget cuts make his higher education priorities clear.

In his recent Task Force Report, Governor Kean stated "But the time to make at least a deposit on our future is now.......Our families, our economy, and our future depend on rebuilding and strengthening the State’s support for our colleges and universities."

In the recent Pension and Health Care legislative hearings, we listened as many of you so passionately spoke about being immigrants yourselves, being the children of immigrants and/or being first generation college graduates. You spoke about having realized your dreams. Aren’t the youth of New Jersey entitled to realize their dreams? This is not a union issue or a fiscal crisis issue. This is a student issue. It is also an issue in UMDNJ’s delivery of medical education and provision of quality health care. Everyone in our State should be entitled to receive an affordable quality education.

We urge you to override Governor Christie’s line item vetoes and help him to live up to the prior funding commitments he previously articulated and reiterated to Higher Education.

Respectfully,

Susanna Tardi
Executive Vice President
for Higher Education, AFT NJSF

Dan O’Connor
President, State Conference
AAUP Chapter

Ann Twomey
President, HPAE