



TCNJ's Local 2364 is affiliated with the **Council of New Jersey State College Locals**, the bargaining agent for more than 7,000 professional staff, librarians and full-time, part-time and adjunct faculty at the nine state colleges/universities of New Jersey.

Dear TCNJ Campus Community,

Welcome to our Union local's monthly newsletter, the online coronavirus edition. We are hoping to share information about what your Union is doing to further education on campus and positive relations with the greater community.

Meeting Schedule

Our local meets monthly on the third Wednesday of each month at 3:00pm in the Social Sciences Building, Room 326. Our last meeting of this semester will now be happening remotely on May 20. Our end of year lunch has, sadly, been cancelled. Your local Executive Committee always works in the summer. Given the emergency situation we face, we will be updating you and even calling meetings of the membership, if necessary, during the summer months.

President's Column: Adapting to Change

Dear Members,

This is a difficult column to write. I miss the campus, I miss my in-person classes, and I miss all of you. COVID-19 suddenly "upended" our lives in countless ways. And I thought not having a contract last fall was tough...that pales by comparison to the constantly changing situation we now all face.

While we all get caught up in talk of budget cuts, larger class sizes, online semesters, employee evaluations, where to buy more paper towels and sanitizing wipes, and each day's variation on the theme of *When is this going to end?*, I'm trying to focus on the positive: good health, sunny days, and birds making their cheerful bird noises. I'm even happy to see the flower-eating bunnies invading my yard again. I have times when, like you, I alternately want to scream or cry, but for now I'm grateful that we all have jobs—even if performing those jobs has challenged us in ways we had never imagined before now.

The New Jersey AFT Council presidents talk to each other via email regularly to monitor how each campus is reacting during this crisis so that we may all collectively protect members' rights. Our AFT Council staff is in touch with the appropriate state officials in

order to further our responsibilities of protecting workers. And, I know that as members we are all committed to helping each other, whether it's by sharing solutions to technology problems, or by offering advice and assistance in resolving student issues.

I'd like to give special recognition to Matt Wund and Don Lovett for their community outreach to the Eastern Service Workers Association on behalf of the AFT. Their ongoing efforts keep all of us engaged with those whose lives have been critically imperiled by the effects of this pandemic, who need our help now more than ever. Matt's and Don's selflessness certainly anchors me in this storm as I reflect on what I can do for others even while the world around us seems to be falling apart. So thank you again Matt and Don! And thanks to all of you AFT brothers and sisters who have supported Matt and Don, and supported one another, during these troublesome times.

Nancy

The CARES Act and TCNJ

Congress passed The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act with bipartisan support on March 27th, 2020. The Act establishes and funds the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) which provides funds to institutions of higher education. Institutions can use up to 50 percent of the funds they receive to cover any costs associated with significant changes to the delivery of instruction due to the coronavirus. The funding for these "Recipient Institutional Costs" is separate from the funding previously made available for "Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students." School allocations are set by a formula in the Act, which is heavily weighted by the number of full-time students who are Pell grant eligible, but also takes into consideration the total full-time student population before the coronavirus outbreak.

Rutgers, as the state's biggest university, received \$54 million under the CARES Act. TCNJ received \$5.14 million. However, the college is refunding \$13.4 million in prorated room and board charges for residential students and, since March, the state has held back 50% of its contribution to the college's operating costs. On April 17, President Foster shared via email with the campus community that "[w]ith continued scrubbing of accounts and tremendous belt-tightening by all units implementing hiring and spending freezes, we have reduced the shortfall [for FY2020] to \$4.7 million" which is 1.8% of TCNJ's total budget. Despite the hiring and spending freezes, continued financial uncertainty obviously remains given that decisions cannot yet be made on what the fall semester will look like, nor is it yet clear how bad the fiscal position of New Jersey is likely to get.

State Funding and Layoffs

Governor Phil Murphy and Senate President Steve Sweeney have both openly discussed layoffs and furloughs for public workers across the state. New Jersey is freezing current year expenditures, including \$71 million in college operating aid, or about half of the total, as part of a \$920 million statewide spending freeze.

Murphy is still, like most governors, working to get additional financial help from the federal government. States got \$150 billion in direct help in the CARES Act (which, according to Senator Booker, included \$3.44 billion for New Jersey). Democrats unsuccessfully pushed to include another \$150 billion in the next tranche of aid but Republicans have ruled out granting further aid to states and the latest \$484 billion aid package contains nothing for states and local governments. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell suggested that rather than seek federal aid states should file for bankruptcy, something they are not currently permitted to do. The partisan nature of McConnell's remarks was made clear when his staff issued his talking points in a press release entitled, "Stopping Blue State Bailouts."

The good news for TCNJ faculty and staff is that we are represented by a union and any furlough or layoffs would have to be negotiated with the AFT. Additionally, Sweeney is on record as saying that "not every government worker could be furloughed, as the workers in public safety, teaching, health and social services offices are badly needed on the job." However,

the precipitous drop in New Jersey's tax revenues due to coronavirus, coupled with the rise in the state's urgent expenditures, are much more extreme than the state has experienced even after the 2008 financial crisis. Just in the seven-week period from March 2 to April 17 the state has paid out \$604 million in unemployment benefits. The costs of combatting coronavirus will likely continue to cause a deterioration in the state's finances and many cuts in services, even if faculty and staff manage to avoid furloughs and layoffs.

Helping Our Neighbors and Students in Need

More than 850,000 people have filed for unemployment benefits in New Jersey since the state shutdown began. On April 17, local farmers groups ran a free farm market on TCNJ's campus and hundreds of people lined up, some waiting more than two hours to receive a box of produce. The Trenton Area Soup Kitchen has reported a 40% increase in demand for meals. Many people in our area are struggling to put food on the table.

In March, the TCNJFT donated \$2,000 to the Lions Lifting Lions fund, which supports TCNJ students experiencing emergency financial need. According to Matt Wund, our members have also been donating food, funds, and time to ESWA during the COVID-19 crisis. Each Saturday, The ESWA has been distributing food to about 30 families in need. AFT members and their families have been helping pack and deliver the items. Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Matt at wundm@tcnj.edu. Packing usually takes place between 10 and 11:30 at the Trenton Meeting of Friends House on 142 E. Hanover Street, Trenton. Deliveries are then made between 11:30am and about 2pm.

AFT New Benefit

The AFT has introduced a new free trauma counselling benefit. Details of all AFT benefits, including the new trauma counselling benefit, are available at <https://www.aft.org/member-benefits>

Contact Us

TCNJ AFT | Email: AFT@tcnj.edu
[Phone and office hours are suspended while the campus remains closed.]