

February 5, 2025

Dear Members of the Kent State United Faculty Association,

We write to you on behalf of AAUP national at the invitation of your presidents Deborah Smith and Sue Clement. We understand that Kent State United Faculty Association has considered disaffiliating from the AAUP since 2014, made the decision to stop paying full dues to national AAUP in 2020, and that you will soon be taking a vote on the question of disaffiliation. We do not want you to disaffiliate because we believe that AAUP is stronger with you and you are stronger with AAUP.

We appreciate the invitation to write to you directly, as members of KSUFA, before you take your vote. President Smith has asked us to explain what specific benefits AAUP national and the Ohio Conference of the AAUP have provided to you related to collective bargaining in the past, and what we might provide in the future. She has also asked whether we recognize KSUFA's position that you are not affiliated with the AFT, and whether we would consider an alternative dues structure for KSUFA given your autonomy.

Before answering these questions, we first wish to introduce ourselves and explain why we consider the AAUP to be a critical organization in this moment, what we have done since we took office last summer, and where we see the future for AAUP. The three of us – Todd Wolfson, Rotua Lumbantobing, and Danielle Aubert – are current and former presidents of long-established unions at public institutions. We were elected at the June 2024 meeting of the AAUP as part of a slate, [United Faculty for the Common Good](#). We ran for national office of the AAUP because our higher education system is in crisis, and the AAUP is the only national union focused exclusively on representing the interests of higher education workers. We have seen enormous movement in the higher ed sector – from a renewed commitment to academic freedom and defending DEI, to new grad worker and non-tenure track faculty organizing, to strike waves, to increasing activism in states where faculty are barred from collective bargaining, like Texas. AAUP is uniquely poised to play a critical role in the fight for national public higher education, in concert with faculty, staff, and student workers represented by AFT and other national unions such as UAW, CWA, NEA, SEIU, and UE, who represent over half a million higher ed workers across the country.

Shared governance begins on our individual campuses – we must hold our administrators accountable, stand up for our students, be free to teach and research what makes sense in our respective fields. The three of us have each done this important work on our campuses – negotiating contracts at Rutgers, Western Connecticut State, and Wayne State. But the proliferating crises afflicting higher education nationwide cannot be resolved on a single

campus. We believe that higher education is a common good, and that we need to focus on building labor power and solidarity, uniting faculty of all ranks, building coalitions with our other campus (non-faculty) colleagues, and expanding political power through coalitions with allied student, climate, and social justice organizations at the local and national levels. We've all seen how our work extends outside our individual campuses and into the communities we serve, and allying with groups beyond our unions strengthens our position.

Since coming into leadership of the AAUP, we have worked to transform the AAUP into the fighting union that is needed at this moment to lead the national movement for higher education. We have held monthly all-member and chapter leader meetings to bring faculty and staff from across the country in conversation with one another. We launched [Organize Every Campus](#), to train AAUP members with the skills needed to win campaigns, grow leaders, and stimulate rank-and-file member activism. We have defended core principles of academic freedom and shared governance through the new [Center for the Defense of Academic Freedom](#), our department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance, and our Committee A on Academic Freedom. We coordinated with 11 international labor unions to lay out a [positive vision for higher education](#) last fall.

Questions

The first two questions are essentially asking what AAUP national and the Ohio Conference of AAUP have done for KSUFA members in collective bargaining. We would like to answer this together with the fourth question, which asks whether we would consider an alternative dues structure, given that KSUFA considers itself to be autonomous.

We do not believe in service-model unionism. This is true in our locals as well as the national. Our role, at national, is to support new bargaining units in their first contracts, to help them get on their feet, to offer training and support for existing union members to ensure there is a strong pipeline of member leaders who will be able to continue negotiating and winning contract campaigns, and to conduct research into national trends or, upon request, into the local finances of specific institutions. We run the AAUP Summer Institute every year with workshops on a wide range of topics relevant for bargaining in higher ed (this year will take place at Morehouse College in Atlanta) and regularly run trainings over Zoom. A KSUFA member who attended the 2024 Summer Institute reported on their participant evaluations that they were "very satisfied" with the "great presenters" and "really good discussions among attendees," noting that "I feel inspired! We are all in this together."

We often respond to crises, such as Ohio Senate Bill 1, which aims to eliminate DEI, ban faculty strikes at public universities, and implement post-tenure review. Senate Bill 83 was defeated thanks in large part to the activism of Ohio AAUP chapters. Defeating Senate Bill 1 will require resources from national AAUP as well as AFT. The unionized faculty at Kent State

have been critical to these battles, and we will be weaker without you. The Ohio Conference of the AAUP will bear the brunt of this loss. It is only by pooling monetary, intellectual, and physical resources that we can take on these fights beyond our campuses. Just one example that demonstrates the value in being a part of a national network is last fall's [Academic Freedom School](#) series, with panels on post-tenure review and political interference in curricula in Florida. Faculty from Florida, who have seen crackdowns on what they teach, can offer strategies to faculty in Ohio.

To respond directly to the question of dues — rates are set by a vote of the membership at the national level, just as they are at the local level. Disaffiliation is not and never has been an effective answer to a local's budget shortfalls. Tenured faculty union dues tend to be lower than those for workers in other sectors. As members of KSUFA, your dues are .8% of your salaries, which are low even for faculty collective bargaining chapters, which typically have dues in the range of 1-1.2%. As union members, you pool together your dues to help build your power as faculty at Kent State. Your local sends dues to the Ohio Conference of the AAUP and to national AAUP to build power with faculty across the state, and with the 42,000 (and growing) faculty and academic staff from 450 campuses across the country. KSUFA does not enjoy a status that is different from other chapters, except the fact that, since 2020, members of KSUFA have not been members of the AAUP in good standing.

The independent status of Kent State United Faculty Association is not in question. All AAUP chapters operate independently. AAUP and AFT do not interfere with bargaining at the local level, unless we are called in to do an analysis of your collective bargaining agreement, provide legal counsel, media support, or galvanize national support in a particular contract fight. Locals pay dues to the state and national AAUP because they provide long-term stability for a chapter beyond the currently elected leadership, and the pooled resources allow AAUP national to take on state and national fights. For example, your member dues made it possible for AAUP to [file a federal lawsuit](#) this week challenging the Trump administration's persecutory anti-DEI executive order. National leadership on these issues requires resources just as your local leadership does, which is why your AAUP dues make a meaningful difference.

Your presidents have offered to provide some financial contribution to support the work of the AAUP. We have chosen not to accept that offer because we are not a nonprofit charity. To offer us a charitable contribution is to treat the AAUP as an outside organization. The power in a union comes from its members. You are the union.

On the AFT Affiliation

Since 2022, a share of the dues that locals pay on behalf of their members to the AAUP is passed onto AFT, the American Federation of Teachers. This gives every AAUP member full

membership in the AFT, and builds power with 1.7 million educators and healthcare professionals and all unionized workers represented by the AFL-CIO.

KSUFA was not present at the 2022 vote at the AAUP biennial meeting, but the motion to affiliate with the AFT passed with overwhelming support from members. Those of us who were there saw the advantages of affiliating with a much larger entity that has the proven ability to organize new bargaining units, a larger legal support network, more influence in Washington, D.C., and a strong base of workers across all 50 states.

We have already seen that we are stronger when we coordinate together. AFT led the supreme court case that opened up student loan forgiveness to thousands of educators at public institutions. AAUP members were immediately able to attend sessions walking them through applying for loan forgiveness – hopefully these were shared with you at the time. Countless of our members at Wayne State, Rutgers, and Western Connecticut State saw hundreds of thousands of dollars of student loans erased thanks to the Supreme Court win, and the support AFT provided for members to navigate the necessary paperwork.

Together with AAUP national staff, AFT provided support to faculty and librarians at Miami University in their first contract. As we navigate the relationship with AFT, we are looking at ways to focus on-the-ground support in the states that need it. AFT provides additional benefits to individual members that can be found [here](#). Presently, all members in good standing are also members of the AFT and the AFL-CIO. This does not include KSUFA members because your local has underpaid national dues on your behalf since 2020.

The fight against Trump requires a strong unified response. We will continue to work in coalition with the major labor unions in order to coalesce the national higher ed sector around a future where public higher education is federally funded and students can afford an education. We regret to come in so late to the decade-long internal conversation that has taken place Kent State regarding your affiliation status.

We encourage you to vote to remain in the AAUP, take part in our national calls, join your brothers and sisters at universities and colleges across Ohio to defeat SB1, and continue building this movement with us.

In solidarity,

Todd Wolfson, President
Rotua Lumbantobing, Vice-President
Danielle Aubert, Secretary-Treasurer