

May 1, 2020

Michael Roth
Office of the President, South College
229 High Street
Middletown, CT 06459

Dear President Roth,

As a major employer, investor, landowner, stakeholder, and consumer of local resources in Middletown, Wesleyan University has long exerted an outsized and often adverse influence on the local community. From its historical complicity in the land theft and wholesale erasure of the Wangunk people indigenous to central Connecticut, to its contemporary gentrification of Main Street and continuous precarization of its workforce under your administration, Wesleyan's presence in Middletown has not been innocent, to say the least.

Today, as racially, economically, and socially marginalized people in Middletown and across the U.S. are furloughed, laid off, evicted, indebted, sickened, and dying in the worst general crisis since the Great Depression, Wesleyan has an unshirkable responsibility to mobilize its resources—including its endowment of over \$1 billion—to aid the most vulnerable members of the Middletown community. This includes but is not limited to Wesleyan's own direct employees, contract workers, Middletown's low-income residents, and undocumented immigrants denied access to unemployment insurance, health insurance, and federal relief efforts.

Continued inaction by Wesleyan, while many Middletown workers—including campus workers—continue to live and work in hazardous conditions to ensure the current and future wellbeing of the University is utterly irresponsible and humiliates the very ideals that it claims as its foundation. Though Wesleyan has taken an important first step by collaborating with the City of Middletown in its COVID-19 response, including the provision of space for first responders and PPE donations to Middletown entities, Wesleyan must do more to support the local community which it actively contributes to marginalizing.

Though many of Wesleyan's direct employees are continuing to be paid for remote work, its contracted workers have not been offered the same employment protections. In particular, more than half of Wesleyan's food service workers contracted through Bon Appétit have been furloughed without pay and health insurance. Moreover, the workers who Wesleyan considers "essential" and are required to continue working on campus are not compensated with hazard pay for their increased vulnerability and hazardous working conditions. It is unacceptable for

Wesleyan to simultaneously require its contracted service workers to risk their lives to maintain essential operations on campus while withholding from them the employment protections enjoyed by directly employed workers. Additionally, if service contractors like Bon Appétit do not refund to Wesleyan the payroll costs saved from cutting hours, furloughs, and lay-offs, they are reprehensibly profiting from the COVID-19 crisis.

Wesleyan should follow the lead of other elite institutions of higher education in the U.S., including Yale University, Georgetown University, American University, Northwestern University, and the University of Pennsylvania in offering direct financial support to the most marginalized constituents of the Middletown community, as well as its directly employed and contracted workers during the COVID-19 crisis.

To this end, we demand that you urgently implement the following measures:

1. Commit to following many other institutions of higher education and allocate Wesleyan's financial resources through a **community fund** to the people of Middletown;
 - a. Commit to collaborating with community entities, including but not limited to the community partners of the Jewett Center for Community Partnerships and the Allbritton Community Advisory Board, to ensure that the fund is managed and distributed by marginalized members of the local community and their representative organizations;
 - b. Work with the Office of Mayor Ben Florsheim to create a working relationship of wealth redistribution that empowers under-resourced local communities, rather than serving as a form of patronage;
2. Commit to **paying full compensation, benefits, and health insurance** to all (including furloughed) employees of Bon Appétit, SMG, RJ Julia, and other service contractors for the full duration of the COVID-19 crisis, regardless of its duration, as [demanded](#) by the union of Bon Appétit workers at Wesleyan;
3. Commit to establishing an **employee assistance fund** to allow both directly employed and contracted workers at Wesleyan to apply for immediate financial relief for basic needs such as food and housing;
4. Commit to reallocating funds earmarked for all nonessential facilities and construction projects (which are now frozen) to the community fund and the employee assistance fund;

5. Commit to immediately **redirect fundraising resources** to launch a fundraising campaign to support the community fund and the employee assistance fund;
6. Commit to **freezing all real estate acquisitions** and reallocate funds earmarked for them to this community fund and the employee assistance fund;
7. Commit to working with service contractors to ensure that both directly employed and contracted workers at the University receive **hazard premiums** of at least 1.5x pay for working in conditions of increased vulnerability to the COVID-19 virus—especially food service and custodial workers.
8. Commit to working with service contractors to ensure that both directly employed and contracted workers at the University receive adequate **personal protective equipment** when working in conditions of vulnerability to the COVID-19 virus.
9. Commit to ensuring **no retaliation** against both directly employed and contracted workers for refusing to perform work due to the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.
10. Commit to **fully inform and frequently update** both directly employed and contracted workers on the policies regarding their working conditions, compensation, and benefits in their preferred languages;
11. Commit to doubling Wesleyan’s **work-study** contribution to student workers (Federal Work-Study, Wesleyan Term-Time Employment, or Freeman Scholars Term-Time Employment) for the spring semester;
12. Commit to **regrant community partner’s access** to Long Lane Farm throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to ensure there is food available to residents who have relied on the consistency of this supply for over five years.
13. Commit to joining over 30 Connecticut state legislators in signing a [petition](#) demanding that Governor Lamont follow the lead of California Governor Newsom by establishing a **fund for undocumented Connecticut residents** who are ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits and federal relief measures, including the CARES Act;
 - a. Commit to making a substantial donation towards this fund once it is established;

We expect you to respond to this petition by **May 8, 2020** with your detailed plan for swiftly implementing the above measures with the urgency they demand.

SIGNED,

Wesleyan Student Organizations

United Student-Labor Action Coalition

Ajua Campos

Open House

La Casa

Climate Action Group

Wesleyan ACLU

Traverse Square

Wesleyan Student Assembly Community Committee

WesNEAT (North End Action Team)

Adolescent Sexual Health Awareness

Middletown/CT Organizations

North End Action Team

Middlesex Immigrant Rights Alliance

Dreamville House Initiatives Director Nur Fitzpatrick