



**Appropriations Committee**

**April 15, 2021**

**Testimony**

**By**

**Karen K. Buffkin**

**Executive Director of Employee Relations**

**S.R. No. 7 Resolution Proposing Approval of a Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees and the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), Local Union 6950**

**H.R. No. 12 Resolution Proposing Approval of a Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees and the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), Local Union 6950**

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Karen Buffkin, and I'm the Executive Director of Employee Relations at the University of Connecticut. We are here seeking your approval of two resolutions, Senate Resolution 7 and House Resolution 12, concerning the collective bargaining agreement between the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees and the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), Local 6950.

The UAW represents approximately 160 Postdoctoral Research Associates (Postdocs) at the Storrs campus of the University of Connecticut. Postdocs hold a doctoral degree and are appointed to contribute to the research goals of a Principal Investigator. Postdoc positions are temporary and for a fixed duration, and are designed to provide the Postdoc with an opportunity to conduct research, author publications, mentor graduate and undergraduate students, and receive training to enable them to pursue a career in academia, research, or other fields.

Postdocs are not funded by the state appropriations allotted for UConn. They are primarily funded by research grants and tuition dollars. Therefore, no additional support is requested from the state to fund this Agreement and there is no impact to the state's general fund.

This agreement is the culmination of collective bargaining that began in November of 2018 and represents the initial contract between the Postdoctoral Research Associates Union and the University. The University's goals throughout the negotiations were to negotiate a fair and economically responsible contract; retain flexibility in the administration of the Agreement; maintain and enhance the University's ability to compete for grants; support and promote the research goals of Principal Investigators; and offer Postdocs fair treatment with regard to compensation and benefits. The Union made proposals during the negotiations to, among other things, increase wages; provide access to retirement benefits; create a grievance and arbitration procedure and just cause protections for discipline and dismissal; establish stronger protections against discrimination and harassment; and provide Postdocs with paid maternity and bonding leave.

We were able to negotiate an increase to the salary minimum for Postdocs to \$50,500 as well as a 1.5% increase to their annual salary effective March 1, 2020, which is to be followed by another 1.5% increase upon the Postdoc's reappointment after March 1, 2020. Thereafter, Postdocs will receive a 3% annual increase to their salary upon reappointment or increased to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) minimum salary for beginning postdocs. Other key elements of our Agreement include:

- Holidays, Paid Time Off, Sick Leave, Personal Leave, and Maternity/Bonding Leave: Status quo holidays (12 state holidays); paid time off (22 days); sick leave (15 days); and personal leave (2 days). There is no payout of unused leave time, nor can unused leave days be rolled over to subsequent reappointments. The Agreement includes a modest leave donation ability to bargaining unit members who, through serious illness, have exhausted their paid leave. Provides 6 weeks of paid maternity leave (8 weeks if c-section) and 15 days of bonding leave for non-birth parent.
- Discrimination and Harassment: Provides protections against discrimination, harassment and retaliation. Postdocs can pursue such complaints through the grievance and arbitration procedure. Our teams viewed strong non-discrimination and harassment protections as mutually beneficial.
- Appointments & Reappointments: Establishes that Postdoc appointments are temporary and for a fixed duration, typically for one year, and not more than 5 years. The University retains sole discretion to appoint, reappoint or not appoint a Postdoc.

We believe that the proposed agreement will help the University maintain a productive Postdoc workforce and allow us to attract the best postdocs throughout the country and the world to come to Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration and continued support of the University of Connecticut. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.