



Business and Financial Affairs
Human Resources Department

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February 16, 2024

Dear WAWU Operational Student Employee Organizing Committee:

We appreciate your recent request to recognize WAWU's Operational Student Employee unit. We are, however, declining that request for two reasons. First, while it is true that employers can voluntarily recognize a union representing an appropriate bargaining unit of eligible employees, that is not the circumstance here. The choice of which public-sector employees have collective bargaining rights, and what rules will govern bargaining between those employees and the employer, is made by the Legislature, not the University. As I believe you know, Senate Bill 5895 – the proposed legislation that would have granted collective bargaining rights to operational student employees – did not advance this legislative session despite the University's support. The Legislature's choice to abandon SB 5895 means that there is currently no statutory framework for the formation of the unit you have proposed or the bargaining that would follow recognition of such a unit. The University believes that legislation establishing the right to bargain, the process for seeking recognition of a union, and the rules that govern bargaining are necessary prerequisites to recognizing a unit of operational student employees.

Second, the University recognizes and supports the choices made by its eligible employees to form unions and it takes pride in the partnerships it has formed with campus collective bargaining representatives to address employee interests while furthering the mission of the University. At the same time, the University places a very high value on the rights of employees to express their views on topics like unionization and to participate in the choice of a union representative. The University has, therefore, insisted that unions organizing bargaining units at the University do so according to the election or card-check rules established by the Legislature and overseen by the Public Employment Relations Commission. If and when bargaining rights are extended to operational student employees, we anticipate following the same path to the certification of a bargaining unit.

Finally, while we are not willing to recognize the bargaining unit you have proposed, we want to assure you that the University has long been and remains committed to treating all employees equitably, regardless of union status or affiliation.

Thanks again for reaching out to us. We appreciate your understanding.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Parkes".

Elizabeth Parkes
Associate Vice President, HR
Western Washington University