



October 29, 2021

The Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli  
New York State Comptroller  
110 State Street  
Albany, NY 12236

Dear Comptroller DiNapoli,

I write in response to your letter from October 27, 2021 regarding Mercy College's ongoing negotiations with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which our adjunct faculty selected to represent them for collective bargaining.

The College entered into negotiations with our adjunct union with a willingness to listen, give serious consideration, and respond thoughtfully to any ideas, proposals, and supporting arguments that they may present. We have a long history of working collaboratively and amicably with our staff union. Since bargaining commenced in October 2019, we have held regular bargaining sessions, even during the COVID pandemic. We exchanged proposals on nearly 30 topics and have reached agreement on half of them. Most first contracts take over a year to negotiate and many take several years. You may be familiar with the lengthy course that negotiations took between Pace University and its adjunct union.

While we continue to make good progress toward reaching an overall contract, there are still many topics on which the parties remain far apart in our positions, including issues of compensation and appointments.

After careful study and analysis, the College presented a wage proposal at our session in early May 2021, that is competitive with the national and regional marketplaces. At the time our adjunct union was formed, an influx of new students from the College of New Rochelle allowed Mercy College to increase its adjunct salaries by over 35% in a single stroke. These raises didn't match wealthier universities which charge their students as much as three times the tuition charged by Mercy or our public institutions which are subsidized by the state or New York City. But they were fully comparable to adjunct salaries paid by most of our private college peers. We are proposing continued future pay increases for adjunct faculty at the same rate as those for our full-time faculty members, as well as a fee if a course they are scheduled to teach is canceled. The parties remain far apart, however, because the Union insists on drastic wage increases of up to 125% more than their current earnings. They claim to be entitled to adjunct wages paid by Fordham University, for example, which are more than twice that paid by Mercy and other comparable private colleges in the state. I should add that Fordham charges more than three times the tuition charged by Mercy to its predominately low-income students of color.

The College has the utmost respect and appreciation for the important role our adjunct faculty members play in the fabric of our institution. Yet, we cannot agree to proposals that are outside the norm for institutions of higher education or would jeopardize Mercy College's mission of providing an exceptional and affordable education to our mainly low-income students.

Please be assured that the College remains committed to bargaining in a good-faith effort to resolve our differences with SEIU and to reaching an overall collective bargaining agreement as soon as possible that maintains compensation levels and general working conditions that are competitive with those of our private college peer institutions. Unfortunately, for now SEIU and our adjuncts' bargaining representatives have stalled negotiations by refusing to provide any counterproposals to the ones Mercy submitted on May 3<sup>rd</sup> (after which the SEIU walked out for the summer), and then proceeded to ignore further counter-proposals by Mercy on August 27<sup>th</sup>. This is unfortunate and counterproductive. I am cautiously hopeful for more productive bargaining sessions with our adjunct union now that it has signaled a willingness to return soon to the bargaining table that Mercy College never left.

During this time Mercy remains focused on its mission of providing an exceptional education to its diverse and deserving students and on continuing to provide one the most affordable tuitions in the region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy L. Hall".

Timothy L. Hall  
President