

Dear President Choi and the Curators of the University of Missouri,

We are aware of the discussions surrounding the outsourcing of our MU custodial and landscaping staff. According to the Columbia Missourian article, this equates to over 250 members of our MU community. As faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders, we write this letter to voice our opposition to privatizing MU custodial and landscaping staff.

MU custodial and landscaping staff are as vital to this campus as any other staff or faculty position. We recognize the challenging decisions the administration is facing due to the fiscal crisis but privatizing these staff positions is not a viable way to save money. There is no amount of savings that is worth the dedication and pride these staff have for MU. In fact, these cuts are a permanent solution to a temporary budget shortfall yet will have lasting implications for individuals affected. These cuts will sever ties with families who have worked for MU for generations.

Our custodial and landscaping staff, as well as their families, are critical members of the Mizzou community. Without their important contributions, the mission of the university would not be achievable. They bring Excellence to their work with beautifully manicured landscaping to the cleanest and safest facilities and demonstrate Respect and Responsibility for the people and physical structures that make up our incredible campus. Most recently, our custodians put their health and safety on the line to deep clean our facilities following COVID closures. These individuals were the first ones to be called back into work during this global pandemic and are always the ones to put their safety at risk to maintain the functioning of the campus. Two months ago these individuals were essential workers yet today they face possible unemployment. This unemployment would come during the very pandemic that they ensured our campus was safe from, and without any health insurance.

Many of these individuals have dedicated decades to the university. Their children attend Mizzou, they cheer at the football games, and enjoy walks through campus. Even if private companies hire and are able to match the current salaries and benefits 100%, they are unlikely to match the tuition coverage for employees and dependents that MU offers and they most definitely will not provide the same community that MU offers their employees. This is important as many of these jobs are some of the lowest paid positions at MU; these employees (and their family members) would no longer have access to the education benefits that many rely on to send their kids to college. This is an important pipeline to access higher education that MU currently facilitates.

The country is at a crossroads, one that MU has faced many times in the past. President Choi speaks for MU with his unwavering commitment to being an inclusive and welcoming environment for individuals from all races and ethnicities. Terminating over 250 individuals, many of whom are Black and Latinx, would keep Mizzou on the same, slow-moving path it has been on the last five years. As President Choi vowed in his statement to the university, more needs to be done to initiate true change within the MU system in regards to race relations. This decision, to terminate our valued MU community members, is one opportunity for us to stand behind our President's words and show the community that we value every member of our community.

In sum, we urge you to retain our custodial and landscaping staff as members of our MU community. We ask that you identify other paths to help MU weather this fiscal storm. The best solutions come from the people who know the job best. Work with custodial and landscaping staff to identify ways to cut their departmental expenses without permanent layoff just as you are working with Deans and department chairs to determine ways to cut expenses in MU colleges and departments. Show our custodial and landscaping staff that MU values them as much as they value the rest of the MU community.

We appreciate your time and consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely, MU faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders