



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

Kimberly van Noort, Ph.D.

Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs

910 Raleigh Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

(919) 962-4614 | kpvannoort@northcarolina.edu

March 23, 2022

Anita Levy, Ph.D.

Associate Secretary

American Association of University Professors

1133 19th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036

Dear Dr. Levy —

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Special Committee's report on the University of North Carolina System. As I wrote to you last fall, we deeply value the importance of academic freedom to a thriving university; the value of shared governance in a public university system; and the imperative of building a more just and equitable future for the students and citizens we serve.

It is precisely because we share those convictions that your report is so disheartening. You offer a relentlessly grim portrayal of one of the nation's strongest, most vibrant, and most productive university systems. It's nearly impossible to square the bleak portrait you've created with the thriving campuses we know and love.

North Carolina's public universities, like institutions across the country, have challenges and shortcomings. We don't try to hide or deny those; we strive to improve them. That focus on progress and investment, which has yielded remarkable results across the UNC System over the last several years, earns negligible attention in your report. What you dismissively label "higher enrollment and good metrics" reflects an enormous commitment of public dollars, faculty and staff dedication, and policymaker support for the bipartisan mission of making higher education more widely available in our state. Your report contains no empirical data about the true health of the university system.

During the last six years, we have lowered tuition for nearly all of our students; improved graduation rates among low-income and minority students; and made historic investments in growing and supporting our system's six historically minority-serving institutions. We continue to recruit and support world-class faculty, and we secured substantial raises for faculty and staff in the most recent (bipartisan) state budget, as well as more than \$2 billion in capital funding for our campuses.

These are not small accomplishments. At a time of deepening polarization across a range of public policy issues, North Carolina stands out for its steady, bipartisan support of higher education. "It is clear that UNC needs strong and independent leadership at all levels," you write. "Leadership that respects faculty expertise and observes widely accepted principles of academic governance; leaders that defend academic inquiry from political pressures and constraints; leadership that is willing to do more than simply pay lip service to the idea of equity." We could not agree more, and we think any honest look across the UNC System will find many such leaders.

One of the great strengths of academia is that it welcomes criticism, even harsh criticism, from within and without. Dissenting voices must be free to air their views, to argue for competing visions of the university's mission, to question leaders and policymakers. They deserve our attention and thoughtful engagement. But our harshest critics should not be mistaken for anything like a consensus among the 260,000 faculty, staff, and students across the UNC System. You're welcome back any time to meet with the scholars, students, and researchers actively engaged in extraordinary work on behalf of North Carolina.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kimberly van Noort".

Kimberly van Noort
Sr. Vice President for Academic Affairs

CC: Norma Houston, Chief of Staff