Dear President Keenan and Board of Trustees,

As students at Salem State, we see the hard work that the administration and the Board of Trustees have accomplished to aid our community. We are extremely thankful for all that has been done. We, a group of student leaders, understand you want what’s best for our school. It’s time for the Salem State community to work together.

As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the pre-existing problems Salem State University is experiencing, we ask that students and all faculty and staff be represented completely and holistically in decision-making from this point forward. Salem State University is recognized as the most diverse public higher education institution in Massachusetts. Students’ and faculty’s opinions must continue to be heard at the same volume as the Board on matters that impact them in their teaching and college experience as has been done before with the Salem State Student Leaders Letter Regarding COVID-19 circulated to the Board and President on March 27, 2020. Because students and faculty are most affected by this crisis, the voices of all shareholders should be considered.

As a result, we believe it is essential to embark on five initiatives: a Community Committee for Policy Review, University Advocacy, Special Considerations for Title IX Cases, Dining Hall Staff, and Public Analyses. To ensure these initiatives are met, the Board of Trustees’ by-laws should be amended to recognize the official authority of the Community Committee for Policy Review as outlined below.

**Community Committee for Policy Review:** A Community Committee for Policy Review must be created and implemented permanently within the University before the Fall 2020 courses begin. Moving forward, the Committee would go from fiscal year to fiscal year. This Committee would be made up of one-third of students, one-third faculty and union staff, and one-third administrators as voting members. Students will be appointed to the Committee by the student officials elected by the whole student body at Salem State. Faculty and staff will be represented by individuals from each of the unions on campus: the Association of Professional Administrators; the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; and the Massachusetts State College Association. The administration and Board will have the opportunity to sit on the Committee or appoint non-union staff on campus to serve in their positions as part of their one-third proportion of seats. No decisions on program cuts or contract cuts can be made from this point on until the Committee is created and agrees on the proposal.

The scope and purpose of this Committee would be to represent the official position of Salem State University on policy issues, particularly issues relating to public higher
education and public issues relating to the Salem State community. The President and Board must agree that the Committee holds this power. The Committee would not be advisory; it would have official authority. The President and all members of the Board of Trustees would be required to publicly and privately advocate for the policies agreed to by the Committee in their fiduciary capacity and just as the Board and University leadership frequently does for policies not representative of the entire community. The Board of Trustees’ by-laws should be amended to recognize that the Community Committee for Policy Review will pass resolutions that count as the official policy positions of the University.

Staff, faculty, and students are impacted the most by decisions made by the Board. It is crucial that they have a stake in the decision-making process in matters that directly concern them. Faculty and staff are impacted by furloughs, online classes, threats to contract agreements, and budget cuts. Students are the most impacted by the cost of attendance. The CCPR would allow for those directly impacted by financial decisions to be a part of the decision-making process alongside the Board.

Faculty and union staff have continually demonstrated a level of connectedness and empathy to the student experience in a different way than the trustees. We want to ensure that our faculty and staff are included in our efforts to make our voices heard by the Board of Trustees and administration. Staff and faculty are the people on campus that provide the students with the most support. The work they do keeps our University functioning. The financial futures of the faculty and staff depend on the decisions being made regarding their positions at the University. Allowing faculty and staff a say in the future of our community and its action moving forward is critical for an equitable transition into the post-COVID-19 future.

We demand that any decisions regarding an increase in tuition, fees, or total cost of attendance will not be made until this Committee is created. As the student loan debt has already reached $1.5 trillion, we must actively find ways to prevent our community from being included in this statistic. As the most diverse public institution in the state, SSU is home to a large community of marginalized groups who form the backbone of our institution. Students from these marginalized groups already face unique obstacles to achieving equitable access to higher education. When Salem State raises its tuition or fees, it makes education less affordable for these students, thus further limiting their access to a degree. It is crucial that these students, in particular, have a voice on the accessibility to quality education from the University. This point is amplified by the increasingly apparent limits to the Board and Administration's advocacy for marginal
change and ineffective policies. We must make it possible for all enrolled and prospective students to feel their identities are represented and their voices matter.

The Community Committee for Policy Review will not impose fee raises; rather, the Committee will determine the validity of Board’s reasoning for enacting these raises, thus having ultimate say on whether the fee raise would be implemented or not. From this point on, when the Committee consents to raise student fees, the Board must take additional steps to notify students through their Salem State emails. The notification will include the previous fee charge, the raised fee, and why the fee raise was enacted. The Committee will have the power to recommend a motion that the Board writes a letter to the Massachusetts Governor and/or Secretary of Education regarding the impacts of accessibility in public higher education.

We want to take a moment to recognize the work President Keenan has been putting in during the pandemic. We are aware that you have been asking for additional federal funding and seeking debt refinancing on the University’s debt obligations. We also know that you have met with other state university presidents and the Massachusetts congressional delegation. You have spearheaded the effort for the state universities and community colleges to release a letter for additional funding. Thank you so much for working in the best interest of your students and public higher education.

It is imperative that all Board members and administrators take similar stances and actions as President Keenan. At a meeting with students, staff, faculty, and Board members present, one of the trustees openly spoke about his opinions on raising taxes for public higher education. A student expressed their concern about fears of rising tuition, and the trustee responded along the lines of “that’s how I feel when my taxes go up.” This was not a private comment. This was an opinion that was held so highly that the member felt confident enough to express his belief to students and faculty at Salem State. These stances cannot be held by the people who represent the students and the University in their official capacities. Not only do these ideas fail the wellbeing of students and are self-serving, they ultimately are not beneficial for the bottom line of the University.

**University Advocacy:** The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened anxiety about already fragile financial futures for many of the University’s students. It is the University’s duty to heavily call for and adamantly back federal and state funding to provide relief for students and public higher education, including the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act. The administration must advocate for changing the way the State distributes the money for higher education. We commend the work the President has done in the short-term in regards to temporary relief of public higher
education. These demands, however, do not expire when the pandemic is over: Salem State University must commit to the college affordability movement until public higher education is and stays debt-free. To ensure Salem State is held accountable for its advocacy and the Salem State community is aware of the things you do for us, an annual report will be distributed to all students, faculty, and staff to document political action the University has taken. The report must be submitted to the Community Committee for Policy Review, and the report must demonstrate alignment with the CCPR's agreed upon policy positions.

**Special Considerations for Title IX Cases:** Sexual and relationship violence is an unfortunate problem on college campuses, including our own. In this unprecedented period of interruption to campus life, we ask that special considerations be made for survivors of sexual and relationship violence on campus.

**Reevaluation of 258e (No-Contact) Orders:** We demand that the University protect the right to complainants with active Title IX cases who access their support systems. Such cases, while seeking to achieve justice for survivors of dating and intimate partner violence, can prove to be challenging ordeals for them. Being forced to reopen the wounds of a traumatic event, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, is extremely taxing for survivors who are trying to heal. Being able to access systems of support for these individuals is critical to a positive outcome for survivors.

As it stands, however, survivors of sexual and relationship violence are prevented from accessing their support systems on-campus. Because of the University’s interpretation of the so-called “third party clause” in 258e orders (commonly referred to as “harassment protection order” or “no-contact order”), complainants who speak about their experience to others can be held accountable should those people who they confide in contact the respondent, even against the will of the complainant. As it stands, seeking support from a complainant’s support system is equated to slander and carries with it the threat of suspension or expulsion. We believe such a stance only serves to further alienate, silence and cause undue emotional and social distress to survivors of dating and intimate partner violence. Thus, we demand that complainants be allowed to seek peer support without the threat of disciplinary sanction and that a statute be put in place to properly investigate cases of third-party interaction.

**Expansion of PEAR Legal Abilities:** We demand that the services provided by the PEAR office be expanded to better serve survivors of dating and intimate partner violence. While we commend the University for establishing such an office, a critical gap in support exists for survivors who file Title IX cases. Currently, PEAR advocates are not allowed to serve as a complainant’s designated advocate in Title IX proceedings. The presence of an advocate in Title IX proceedings, unlike criminal cases, is not guaranteed in the Constitution. Thus, access to an advocate in such a process is not
feasible for complainants facing financial challenges—making the Title IX process more
difficult for our most vulnerable students. We demand that PEAR advocates be allowed
to represent complainants in Title IX proceedings or that advocates be provided to
complainants by the case manager at no cost to the student.

**To Address Timeline of Title IX Cases:** We demand that the process surrounding Title
IX cases be streamlined to better serve complainants and respondents. While parties are
told the case will be settled within 60 business days, University breaks are not considered
to be business days despite being deemed business days in University offices.
Complainants are given 10 days after the resolution of such cases to file an appeal. This
amount of time is unacceptable and insufficient, especially considering the traumatic
nature of the process. The appeal period should not be any shorter than the span of time
that the case remained open from the date of initial reporting. Furthermore, cases have
been left outstanding following the switch to online learning. We believe providing
greater transparency regarding case timelines and resolving cases in a timely manner
benefit all parties involved.

**Establishment of a Special Commission:** Also critical to streamlining the Title IX
process is the establishment of a special commission to exclusively investigate such
cases. The current system of utilizing professionals from various offices, who often have
contact with involved parties, only serves to place undue emotional burden on both
parties. Such traumatic events must be dealt with discreetly by a special commission to
ensure equity in Title IX proceedings.

It is our firm belief that such actions will make clear the University's commitment to
gender equity and the rights of survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence. We
demand that students be notified of these policy changes through their Salem State emails
so that students affected by domestic and intimate partner violence in the future feel
empowered to seek justice and hold offenders accountable on-campus. Inadequacy in the
dealings of Title IX cases is a threat to the health and safety of the campus community.
We seek to empower survivors through administrative representation in these policy
changes to ensure our basic needs are met.

**Dining Hall Staff:** We ask that in addition to students and faculty, there is also
consideration of staff in light of recent events. Specifically, to address the Aramark
contract termination, we ask that the 2019-2020 dining hall staff will be given the option
to return or be prioritized in the hiring process for the upcoming school year.

**Public Analyses:** The Board will allow for public analyses of any analytical or statistical
data that goes into the decision to cut programs, eliminate courses, increase class size, or
furlough employees, including Return On Investment (ROI) data and Business
Intelligence Model. These analyses can be qualitative or quantitative and must involve
robust student, faculty, and staff input. The data will be accessible to all students through their Salem State emails and their Navigator accounts.

As leaders, we commend the actions Salem State has taken to adhere to the last set of demands outlined by students, including implementing a flexible pass/no pass grading option and issuing refunds. We appreciate the hard work and effort exhibited by all levels of the University during this time of crisis. As Salem State students we have each faced many unique adversities, from the financial aspect to mental health and the stigma of not being at our best one hundred percent of the time. We are a strong student body and would like to lessen the hardships for the coming Fall, so we can continue to learn and grow together as a community. We hope this gives students a clear outlet to have their voices heard moving forward.

Sincerely,
The Executive Boards of the following Salem State University student organizations and students and 300+ individual students.

WMWM
Honors Program Advisory Committee
American Cancer Society On Campus
Student Nursing Association

Theta Phi Alpha
Sunrise Salem
International Student Association
Asian Student Association
Latin American Student Organization

Student Theatre Ensemble
Community Service Initiative
Urban Arts Theatre