EA R3: Supporting Staff Financial Well-Being Through Equitable Compensation and Sustainable Benefits

Abstract: This resolution calls upon Cornell University to address the growing financial pressures facing staff as salary increases fall below inflation while healthcare premiums and out-of-pocket costs continue to rise. It recognizes that these financial burdens are compounded by increased workloads, reduced resources, and expanding responsibilities, creating significant stress and threatening employees' financial security and access to necessary healthcare. The resolution calls for limits on increases to healthcare premiums and out-of-pocket costs and a stronger formal role for Employee Assembly participation in university-wide salary and benefits discussions. It further calls for the establishment of a committee led by the Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, with Employee Assembly representation and participation from employees across organizational levels, to develop actionable recommendations that advance staff financial well-being, equitable compensation, and sustainable benefits.

Sponsored by: Carl Cornell, Chair of the Employee Assembly; Danyel Wierson, Vice Chair of Operations and Finance Employee Assembly, Rose Howard, Executive Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly; Alysia Ericsson, Parliamentarian of the Employee Assembly

Reviewed by: Employee Assembly Executive Committee (10/28/26), Benefits and Policy Committee (11/2/26), Priority Poll Committee (11/2/26)

Whereas, the assemblies serve as advisory bodies to the administration, representing matters of concern and constituent interests to University leadership, and;

Whereas, Cornell University staff are essential to the university's academic mission, research enterprise, student experience, and daily operations, and their financial well-being is fundamental to the university's continued success;

Whereas, salary increases that have consistently fallen below inflation, combined with rising living expenses, have diminished employees' purchasing power and placed increasing financial strain on staff and their families;

Whereas, Cornell employees are experiencing a second consecutive year of health insurance premium increases exceeding 10%, while salary increases have remained comparatively modest and well below inflation, further widening the gap between employee compensation and the cost of living;

Whereas, changes to Cornell's health benefits structure, including increases to deductibles, copayments, and out-of-pocket maximums, compound the impact of rising premiums and shift a greater share of healthcare costs onto employees;

Whereas, these changes disproportionately burden employees who rely most heavily on healthcare services, requiring those with greater medical needs to bear a larger share of the financial costs associated with accessing necessary care;

Whereas, higher deductibles, copayments, and out-of-pocket maximums may cause employees to delay or forgo necessary medical care, hesitate to seek timely treatment, or delay seeking emergency services because of financial concerns, potentially worsening health outcomes and increasing the long-term costs of care;

Whereas, these financial pressures are occurring alongside increased workloads, shifting responsibilities, staffing reductions, and expectations that employees maintain or expand services with fewer resources and less institutional support;

Whereas, the combination of financial insecurity, increased workload, and rising healthcare costs creates significant stress for employees, including at a time when access to healthcare and other support services may be especially important;

Whereas, a sustainable compensation and benefits strategy must account for the total financial impact on employees, including salary growth, insurance premiums, deductibles, copayments, and other out-of-pocket expenses, rather than evaluating these costs independently;

Whereas, decisions about compensation and employee benefits have significant consequences for recruitment, retention, morale, institutional trust, and Cornell's ability to maintain a stable, supported, and effective workforce;

Whereas, staff members possess essential firsthand knowledge of the financial and operational realities of working at Cornell, and meaningful staff representation in compensation and benefits discussions is necessary to ensure that university decisions reflect the experiences and needs of the people most directly affected;

Whereas, the Employee Assembly serves as a representative body for Cornell staff and has a responsibility to elevate employee concerns, advocate for equitable working conditions, and promote policies that support the financial well-being of the university's workforce;

Be it therefore resolved, that the Cornell University Employee Assembly calls upon university leadership to establish a stronger and more formal role for staff representation in the development, evaluation, and negotiation of salary increase expectations and employee benefits structures;

Be it further resolved, that the Employee Assembly calls upon Cornell University to establish clear and responsible limits on annual increases to employee health insurance premiums, deductibles, and other out-of-pocket healthcare costs, with meaningful staff representation in determining these limits and consideration of the cumulative financial impact on employees;

Be it further resolved, that the Employee Assembly calls for the establishment of a formal university committee dedicated to advancing staff financial well-being, with a mandate to review compensation practices, salary increase expectations, benefits costs, cost-sharing structures, and the cumulative financial impact of university policies on employees;

Be it further resolved, that the establishment of this committee is not intended to replace, duplicate, or diminish the ongoing work of Cornell's Human Resources staff or other university subject matter experts. Rather, its purpose is to complement existing efforts by strengthening transparency, facilitating meaningful staff representation, and ensuring that decisions affecting staff financial well-being are informed by employee experience and communicated through a clear and accountable process.

Be it further resolved, that this committee be led by the Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer (VP CHRO) or their appointed designee with subject matter expertise, and include, at minimum, formal representation from the Employee Assembly, alongside representatives from relevant university offices and employees representing a range of institutional units, job classifications, organizational levels, and employment experiences;

Be it further resolved, that the committee be charged with developing actionable recommendations to strengthen staff financial security, promote equitable compensation and benefits, and ensure that university decisions account for the relationship between employee pay, healthcare affordability, workload expectations, and the cost of living;

Be it further resolved, that the committee establish a transparent process for gathering staff input, communicating its findings and recommendations, and reporting progress to the Employee Assembly and university leadership on a regular basis;

Be it further resolved, that the committee be charged with conducting a comprehensive, data-driven study of the financial well-being of Cornell staff, in collaboration with relevant university subject matter experts, staff representatives, and, where appropriate, faculty with expertise in labor economics, compensation, and related fields. This study should examine trends in staff compensation relative to inflation and the cost of living; salary growth relative to living expenses; pay compression and internal compensation equity; changes in workload, responsibilities, and staffing levels relative to salary growth; and increases in healthcare premiums, deductibles, copayments, and other out-of-pocket expenses. The study should use available quantitative data and appropriate comparative benchmarks to establish a clear picture of the cumulative financial pressures facing staff and inform actionable recommendations for improving staff financial security and the long-term sustainability of Cornell's compensation and

benefits structures. Findings and recommendations should be shared with university leadership and the Employee Assembly, subject to applicable privacy and confidentiality requirements.

Be it further resolved, that the Employee Assembly calls upon university leadership to provide a formal written response to the committee's recommendations within 60 days of their submission, identifying which recommendations will be adopted, which will not be adopted, and the rationale for each determination. Where recommendations are accepted, the response should include an anticipated implementation timeline. Where recommendations are not adopted, university leadership should provide an explanation and, where appropriate, identify alternative measures to address the concerns raised. These responses should be shared with the committee and the Employee Assembly to support transparency, accountability, and continued progress toward improving staff financial well-being.

Be it further resolved, that the committee provide progress reports twice yearly to the Employee Assembly and university leadership on its activities, recommendations, and progress toward implementation, and that the committee be authorized to request relevant information from appropriate university offices, subject to applicable privacy, confidentiality, and legal requirements, as necessary to fulfill its mandate.

Be it finally resolved, that the Employee Assembly calls upon Cornell University leadership to treat staff financial well-being as an institutional priority and to work collaboratively with staff representatives toward compensation and benefits policies that are equitable, sustainable, and consistent with Cornell's stated commitment to its employees and its mission.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Rose Howard, Executive Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly