



NEW ENGLAND JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

Dear President Bacow and Provost Garber,

As Jewish clergy who are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and education, and who believe in giving teaching and research assistants the basic rights and financial support that their esteemed position demands, we stand in support of the Harvard Graduate Student Union as they go on strike.

The HGSU has been seeking a contract with Harvard for nineteen months, ever since student workers formed their union. We believe that their demands should be met so that they can give their very best to the students of every department and school at Harvard.

The Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, drawing on centuries of Jewish tradition regarding the rights of workers, has affirmed:

Regarding the obligations of employers to employees, the Torah says “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether of your own people or a stranger.... You must pay the worker’s wage on the same day, before the sun sets..., lest in crying out to God against you, you will incur guilt.” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The Torah is clear in its demand that employers treat workers justly and Jewish law protects the worker from exploitation and neglect by employers. (Policy Statement on Labor, 2009)

As an expression of the basic dignity due to every human being, we support the demand that student workers have the right to bring complaints of discrimination and harassment to an independent grievance procedure that gives student workers a voice in the process.

In the interest of providing health care as a human right, and a source of wellbeing that contributes to their ability to bring their very best to the students they teach, we support the demand that student workers receive comprehensive and affordable coverage, including specialist visits as needed, access to mental health providers during summer months, and dental coverage, which Harvard’s School of Public Health would warrant is a critical part of healthcare, NOT a luxury.

Following the moral imperative to pay a fair wage, we support the demand that all student workers receive fair pay for their research and teaching work.

And in the interest of compassionate care for anyone experiencing loss, we support the demand that student workers receive 5 days of bereavement leave, allowing Jewish student workers to observe *shiva*, our tradition's seven days of bereavement following a death.

As a preeminent institution of higher learning, it is unbecoming of Harvard University to undervalue those who support students in the classrooms, libraries, and research labs every day. We urge you to live up to the high standards for which you are known, and negotiate a fair contract immediately.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Barbara Penzner
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Rabbi Michael Rothbaum
Congregation Beth Elohim, Acton

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, Harvard-Radcliffe '85
Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, West Newton

Rabbi Neil Kominsky, Harvard College '66
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Rabbi Jonathan Spira-Savett, Harvard College '90
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Rabbi Gerald Serotta, Harvard '68

Rabbi Tom Alpert, former Harvard University graduate student
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Rabbi David Jaffe
The Kirva Institute

Barney Horowitz,
Retired NLRB , 1975-2017
Rabbi Greg Hersh
Burning Bush Adventures

Rabbi Arthur Waskow,
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