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Ocean County College Staff Standing Up as Management Fails to Bargain

Unfair Labor Practices Charge Filed: 51-member unit passed over for raises executives award themselves

EDISON...The largest higher education union in New Jersey has filed unfair practices charges against Ocean County College (OCC) faulting resistant management there for ignoring an impartially recommended contract settlement while continuing to take raises for themselves. Despite having the highest paid community college president in New Jersey in the \$222,200 Jon Larson, OCC management rejected the recommendation of an impartial factfinder that suggested the school grant modest increases in a three-year contract and maintains an inflexible position.

“The Ocean County College Federation of Professional Administrators local has offered several different contract proposals and each has been met with a resounding ‘No’ from management,” said union President Michael Putnam. “The executives simply refuse each union proposal and walks away from the table. We are left negotiating against ourselves.” Putnam acknowledges the impact of economic stress on both the College as well as union members. “Yet even in these poor economic times the College has forged new partnerships, launched new programs and continues to expand its main campus. We are asking that management return to the table with a negotiating team empowered to enter into an agreement that is mutually satisfactory and will allow us to face the future of OCC together.”

The union has filed an unfair labor practices charge July 12 with the Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) alleging that management at the 10,000-student college is failing to bargain in good faith in an attempt to undermine the union. After refusing to honor the independent fact-finders recommendations, college officials have yet to offer any contract proposals to workers. Meanwhile, union workers have not received a raise in three years, while the college has continued to increase salaries of non-represented executives and hourly workers.

“Why would Ocean County College refuse a settlement proposed by a neutral third-party based on an independent analysis of an institution that continues to grow in every area other than salaries for unionized workers?” asked Donna M. Chiera, American Federation of Teachers New Jersey (AFTNJ) President. “Could it be that they are trying to break this small local union of dedicated professionals who contribute so much to students and the campus community?” The Ocean County College Federation of Professional Administrators local is affiliated with AFTNJ, a 30,000-education worker union federation representing 20,000 college and university full and part-time faculty, administrative campus staff and 10,000 prekindergarten through 12 teachers and support professionals.

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The American Federation of Teachers NJ is a statewide federation of unions representing education workers from pre-kindergarten through graduate school. AFTNJ represents the largest group of higher education professionals in the state. The union represents 10,000 pre-kindergarten through 12 teachers and support personnel in several schools districts as well as private, religious and charter schools.