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Chatham University Faculty pauses its campaign for recognition

The strategic move comes in response to expected NLRB changes

PITTSBURGH (Nov. 27, 2024) – Chatham Faculty United (CFU), the union of faculty at Chatham University, has submitted paperwork to withdraw from NLRB hearings, pausing its campaign for recognition. The decision follows 11 months of hearings before the National Labor Relations Board – quite possibly the longest in the history of the Pittsburgh regional office – prompted by the Chatham Board of Trustees refusing to recognize bargaining rights for any member of the faculty.

Based on the record of the first Trump administration from 2017-21, labor organizers are anticipating forthcoming changes to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that will be unfavorable to unionizing efforts. As a result, the union's case would likely be decided by an NLRB crafted by the new federal administration, which [observers](#) believe will be decidedly anti-union. Chatham faculty made the decision in consultation with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which they had selected to represent them. The decision protects the union's right to pursue recognition in the future and also protects faculty at other private institutions who may wish to unionize in the future.

"While we have withdrawn from the hearings, we are still an active union affiliated with AFT, and we, the Chatham faculty, will be determining together what our next steps will be," said Jessie Ramey, Associate Professor of Women's & Gender Studies and History and member of the organizing committee. "The facts in our situation have not changed, and we do not concede the case."

In January 2024, more than 80% of Chatham faculty indicated their desire to form a union by signing union cards. The University's Board of Trustees declined to voluntarily recognize Chatham Faculty United. The Board of Trustees maintained its position that not a single member of the faculty could be in the union and asked the NLRB to start holding hearings to determine if there could be a bargaining unit.

"Our decision to withdraw from the NLRB hearing process does not reflect an improved working environment. Nor does it indicate that Chatham faculty enjoy meaningful self-governance," said Jennie Sweet-Cushman, Professor of Political Science and also a

member of the organizing committee “Instead, this is a strategic legal decision to protect our future as a union and the future unionization efforts of faculty at other institutions.”

Chatham’s Board of Trustees could still choose to either voluntarily recognize CFU or allow the faculty to vote on whether to have CFU as the collective bargaining agent at any time.

While the union has been delayed in achieving its desired outcome of collective bargaining rights, it can still take collective action. As Chatham Faculty United, the faculty will still be advocating for the priorities that brought it together: to protect pay and benefits; to create authentic shared governance; to ensure safe and healthy teaching and learning environments; to provide transparency around budgets and decision making, and hold decision makers accountable; to develop a formalized grievance process that protects those who report issues; and to build community.

Chatham Faculty United will continue working to enact real positive change for the thriving university that all faculty, staff and students deserve. The union will be inviting faculty to a meeting in January to plan its next steps.

For more information about Chatham Faculty United, visit ChathamFaculty.org.

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