



George Mason University Student Government



2009-2010

Administrative Subcommittee on Dining Services

A Division of the University Services Committee

Alexander Romano – Senior Ranking Member

Nicola Anderson – Senior Member

David J. Bier – Member

Shane Smith – Member

****For immediate release****

****No embargo date****

Dear George Mason University Community:

We are the Administrative Subcommittee on Dining Services, more commonly known as the food committee or dining committee. We are Student Government Senators that meet with the top dining administrators every week for an hour or more representing students' concerns and initiatives. We serve as the chief voice for the student body on all dining related matters. We want to directly address some rumors you might have heard about some dining workers protesting against Sodexo, the contracted vendor for your food services here at George Mason University.

On Thursday, April 15th, Taco Bell and Freshens closed early due to employees protesting by not showing up to work. In addition, several employees did not show up at Southside that morning, so students were not able to get the full breakfast options that they usually receive. The new Jazzman's in the School of Art was also closed. This caused extra stress on many dining employees who showed up to work on this day because they had to cover shifts for those who were protesting. This disrupted the student body's ability to have their regularly provided services. When we the students are paying thousands of dollars a year for a meal plan, it is our right to have these regular services provided to us. When that right is infringed upon, someone must look out for the students, because ultimately we are the ones who suffer. Overall, on Thursday, Mason Dining was down 20% of their staff, limiting their ability to fully function and serve the Mason community.

There have been several frivolous claims thrown around by some employees that have been incited by the local Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Some dining employees that have teamed up with the SEIU have accused dining administrators, such as Resident District Manager Denise Ammaccapane, of not listening or responding to their concerns about low wages, a lack of hours, and insufficient benefits. In reality, the workers have never contacted dining administrators to seek help on such matters. We can tell you from

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frequent meetings with Ms. Ammaccapane, Bill Fry and Peggy Morales that they are some of the most receptive and responsive people when it comes to addressing any student or employee concerns.

Let's talk facts for a moment. It's a fact that Sodexo pays extremely competitively. The average hourly wage here at Mason is \$10.75 an hour and employees never start below \$8.50 an hour. The minimum wage in the Commonwealth of Virginia is \$7.25 an hour, so to say that wages are not competitive and unfair is a totally unfounded accusation. Employees get paid based on their prior experience and the nature of work they're doing; not everyone is going to be paid the same. Sodexo also contributes a considerable amount of money to workers benefits.

Some employees claim that their hours have been unfairly adjusted. This is not the case. This is a business and when business is down, adjustments must be made. Any modifications made to hourly schedules are the sole result of low sales. For example, last week, sales were significantly down and adjustments were made to compensate. The average amount of time an employee has worked here is 5 years and there are some who have been here for 20 years. How can it be such a bad work environment if so many employees have been here for so long? It's hard to argue with the fact that only 77 employees have signed onto to this petition out of the over 450 employees that work for Mason Dining.

There have been multiple reports alleging that workers who are in favor of unionization are harassing other co-workers who aren't on board. This has made for a hostile work environment. This might seem ironic since these employees are accusing dining administrators as the ones harassing them. This can be proven by the recent protests that have turned uncivil and caused public unrest. These protests have disrupted the peace of George Mason University with noise that has affected the academic setting. In addition, several dining employees and SEIU officials left students feeling uneasy entering Southside when these protesters illegally marched into the building, employing scare tactics and intimidation.

Additionally, it is important to note that there were SEIU photographers running alongside the employees protesting with professional DSLR cameras, turning this into a media fiasco and instigating the situation. They have incited fear and anger during these rallies and have transformed what was once a peaceful protest into an unruly commotion. The bottom line is this: the dining committee is in full support of the protesters' first amendment rights to free speech. However, we can attest to the integrity and principles of Mason Dining's employment and safety practices and the administrators that oversee them. We can say unequivocally that all Mason Dining administrators have treated their employees with the utmost respect. **We, the representatives of the George Mason University student body, strongly condemn the false claims and accusations leveled against Sodexo and Mason Dining by the SEIU.**

Sincerely,



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Vice Chairman, University Services Committee
Administrative Subcommittee on Dining Services, Senior Ranking Member



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