



# Georgia's Higher Education Union CWA Organizing Local 3265



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As of March 20, 2020, the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) reported 287 confirmed cases of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, with 10 reported deaths – so far. On March 16, 2020, Governor Brian Kemp declared a public health state of emergency and has ordered all public schools and colleges to close through the end of March. According to Board of Regents (BOR) Policy *Time Away From Work: Inclement Weather and Other Emergencies*, “When an Institution is declared closed, all academic classes, administrative offices or other functional areas are suspended and only essential services are maintained, until the institution is officially reopened as declared by the President.”

Despite Governor Kemp’s order closing all colleges and universities in Georgia, all University System of Georgia employees have been directed to telecommute, report to campus, or stay home without guarantee of pay. There are already reports of furloughs and lay-offs in facilities personnel.

Why is USG not complying with the Governor’s executive order?

USG seems to think it only applies to protecting the safety of students and faculty. But if our campuses are unsafe for students and faculty, then they are unsafe for staff as well. By punishing potentially vulnerable employees through suspensions in pay, furloughs, or lay-offs, or by requiring non-essential staff to put themselves and their families at significant health risk by reporting to work on campus, USG demonstrates it does not take the Governor's emergency declaration seriously. This is unacceptable.

The United Campus Workers of Georgia (UCWGA) believes that USG and all participating institutions are in direct violation of Gov. Kemp’s lawful order to close all campus operations—excluding essential personnel—and USG’s own policies. Per BOR 8.2.7.7, presidents of USG institutions have the decision-making power to declare emergency closures and issue **leave with pay**.

**It is time for USG to comply with Governor Kemp’s executive order and institute a closure plan consistent with that order and its own policies. UCWGA demands that USG close all twenty-six campuses and issue emergency paid leave to all full-time and part-time personnel at their current wages, with hazard pay for essential personnel, for the duration of closure.**

USG is also reporting that institutions like the University of Georgia and Athens-Clarke County are still ‘low-risk’ for COVID-19 spread. This is an inaccurate and profoundly dangerous claim. It puts public employees, their families and their communities at risk. Some USG institutions like UGA are already reporting confirmed cases of employees with COVID-19. ***All twenty-six USG institutions and their communities are high-risk for potentially devastating economic and biological consequences of COVID-19.***

UCWGA also calls on our state representatives and senators to take steps to ensure that USG closes all campuses pursuant to Governor Kemp’s executive order and issue emergency paid leave to maintain the

health and safety of all USG employees. Unless these steps are taken now in order to stem the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of all of those who are part of these campus communities, our recovery from this pandemic will be longer and slower than it needs to be.

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