

March 9, 2021

William Donnelly, Chair of the Board of Directors
Michael Johnson, President
Steven Herbert, Provost and Academic Vice President
John Carroll University
1 John Carroll Blvd.
University Heights, OH 44118

Dear Mr. Donnelly, Prof. Johnson, and Prof. Herbert,

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the recent approval by John Carroll University's Board of Directors of a "budgetary hardship" amendment to the university's Faculty Handbook. When read within the broad context of faculty handbooks at most universities, this change apparently could permit the termination of individual tenured faculty members under the guise of restructuring and program prioritization, absent the kind of acute financial crisis that normally would permit such extreme measures. Both faculty governance and the integrity of tenure seem to be hanging by a thread.

The de facto elimination of tenure (via this low bar of "budgetary hardship") identifies the university with employment practices that have no place in American higher education. Under this new amendment, the university administration will be in a position to terminate tenured faculty members without cause, without the criterion of financial exigency, and without appeal. This process stands in marked contrast to generally accepted ethical guidelines—an especially striking embarrassment for an institution notable for its well-deserved commitment to Jesuit values.

As the largest and most prominent organization of professional historians in the United States, with over 11,000 members engaged in the teaching and practice of history at colleges and universities, secondary schools, historical institutes, museums, and other institutions, the American Historical Association is most concerned with the implications of this new policy on John Carroll's traditionally strong history department. The Association recognizes that every discipline has a claim to its centrality to higher education. Moreover, each institution has its own mission, its own priorities, and its own culture. What we ask, however, is that individuals making budgetary decisions in higher education prioritize the educational missions of their institutions in a manner consistent with the humane values that stand at the core of education itself. And we are well aware that during times of crisis, programs in the humanities and social sciences, like history, tend to find themselves under scrutiny in the first instance.

As a Jesuit institution with a strong tradition of liberal arts education, John Carroll has an admirable record of high-quality history education provided by an accomplished faculty committed to undergraduate education. The "budgetary hardship" amendment is in essence a new tool for arbitrary personnel decision-making, rendering history faculty essentially contingent instructors and diminishing

the quality of a John Carroll degree. The AHA urges the administration to consider the educational impact of this new policy. This measure has the potential to weaken the preparation of your students for the global citizenship imperative to economic and civic accomplishment, as well as for the lifelong learning essential to occupational and professional success.

As experienced administrators we certainly understand the pressure of budgets, and do not underestimate the financial necessities you confront at this particular moment. Declaration of budgetary hardship, however, might have serious and deleterious consequences for the practice of historical work and hence the quality of undergraduate education at John Carroll University. Once programs are truncated or eliminated, they are often exceedingly difficult and expensive to reconstitute. What might be suggested as a temporary solution to an immediate crisis often becomes a long-term problem. We urge you to reconsider the threat to tenure protections that the board's budgetary hardship amendment represents.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Jones
AHA President



James R. Grossman
AHA Executive Director