



# Cleveland State University

*engaged learning*

College of Sciences and Health Professions  
*Department of Biological, Geological, and Environmental Sciences*

To Michael D. Johnson, President  
Steven T. Herbert, Provost  
William P. Donnelly and the Board of Directors  
John Carroll University  
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On March 1, 2021, the John Carroll Board of Directors announced that they had rewritten the faculty handbook to grant themselves the right to fire tenured faculty without cause if the University declares a budgetary crisis. The Board did so despite protests by the University's faculty. Worse, because John Carroll faculty have no representation on the Board of Directors, this decision was made without any input from those people who have deep knowledge of how universities operate on a day-to-day basis. In response, I, as the President of Cleveland State's Faculty Senate, must discourage this attack on tenure and on the principles of university shared governance.

As reported in the press, John Carroll University leaders need only produce a financial forecast that shows a projected deficit of 6% and two additional years of financial "hardship", an undefined term. Worse, as many universities found during the recent pandemic, projections were not realized. In contrast, "financial exigency" is a high threshold related to financial documents, not a subjective set of projections.

In the short and long term, the Board's actions diminish academic freedom. That independence cannot be taken lightly. Tenure gave faculty the strength they needed in 2012, for example, to urge the president of John Carroll to encourage U.S. Catholic bishops to accept conditions offered by the Obama administration that enabled religiously affiliated colleges to comply with contraceptive coverage outlined in the Affordable Care Act. Without the protection of tenure, faculty would have found it difficult to write or to even publicly support such a letter. Similarly, faculty in the hard sciences might not pursue potentially life-saving research if it involved subjects, methods, or equipment the Board may find unacceptable. Thus, without tenure, faculty who conduct research, or reach conclusions with which the Board of Directors may disagree, could be fired. That threat will stifle faculty voices and research, and as a consequence, their ability to best educate students.

In the long term, an assault on tenure does more than affect professors. Since professors prefer institutions that value academic freedom and provide faculty tenure, JCU professors without tenure will have a strong incentive to seek new positions. Similarly, because faculty prefer the security of tenure, JCU will be less and less able to hire high quality new faculty. The Board's decision will devalue the quality of a JCU education and will likely push JCU down in national

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rankings such as those published by US News & World Report and Bloomberg's. The decline of the quality of the faculty and the fall of the University's reputation will threaten the wellbeing of the University by undermining its ability to attract students, and thus produce the negative financial situation the board's changes propose as a response, in essence creating a vortex of decline.

Here at Cleveland State University, our faculty care about John Carroll University's reputation. Many of us work with your faculty through graduate programs and research. We would like you to preserve faculty governance, as well as the stability of John Carroll's faculty, enrollment, and financial wellbeing, and therefore I can say that the faculty at Cleveland State as a group oppose the Board of Directors' attempt to functionally eradicate tenure. In that, we stand in solidarity with the faculty at John Carroll University.

"The American Association of University Professors maintains that tenure is a 'safeguard to academic freedom, which is necessary for all who teach and conduct research in higher education.' Professors must be free to investigate their topics and present their conclusions without fear of repercussion from interest groups, corporations, or the government. Tenure provides that protection. In doing so, tenure protects the quality of research and teaching at institutions of higher education from the external, biased interests of businesses, political groups, or other entities."

Your proposed changes fly in the face of all recommendations and expected standards set by the American Associate of University Professors (AAUP). I will be surprised that such actions, if carried out, fail to garner a review by their Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

Respectfully,



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