



September 16, 2021

TO: Dr. Edward Montgomery, President and members of the President's cabinet

On behalf of the Administrative Professional Association (APA), the APA Executive Board wants to express some concerns about staff safety that also have implications for the greater WMU and Kalamazoo communities amid the ongoing pandemic and surging Covid-19 cases. We appreciate that many factors influenced your decision not to require faculty, staff, and most students to be vaccinated before they returned to campus. We welcome the current mask mandate and mandated testing as scientifically proven protective measures. However, with only 40% of WMU students providing documentation of vaccination and Michigan's vaccination rate plateauing around 55% (Anderson et al., 2021), we believe more can be done to ensure the safety of staff and our greater communities during these challenging times. The requests below are based on the CDC recommendation to actively encourage sick employees to stay home and to implement flexible worksites and flexible work hours (2020).

COVID-19 Safety Requests:

1. Reinstate and extend the Covid-19 Leave that expired on April 30, 2021. This leave will allow non-bargaining staff to have access to the necessary time off and the flexibility to ensure their health and the health of others without impacting their accrued sick or annual leave. The stated reason for the leave still exists, specifically that the pandemic "continues to be a disruptive force, and for some, there may remain ongoing needs for extra support." It is inevitable that returning nearly 18,000 students and 2,700 staff to residence halls, classrooms, and offices will lead to a spike in cases on campus and in [Kalamazoo County](#), especially with the [high level of community transmission in Kalamazoo County](#). Meanwhile, the "soft gate" of mandatory testing for the unvaccinated will not prevent staff from becoming infected while working on campus. Therefore, continuing the Spring 2021 Covid-19 Leave process through Human Resources is necessary to support a healthy campus community.
2. Allow the use of the Telecommuting Policy as originally intended and approved by the [University Policy Committee](#). Specifically, we ask that direct supervisors, rather than deans or vice presidents, be allowed to manage their offices or departments based on the needs of their area. Limiting direct supervisors' flexibility to utilize the Telecommuting Policy as written indicates distrust in their ability to manage and in the integrity and work ethic of WMU non-bargaining staff. We acknowledge that telecommuting is not ideal for, or available to, every individual or office, but blanket guiding principles that effectively curb flexible management of University offices

(especially around a long-requested policy) makes it more difficult for supervisors and staff to effectively and efficiently do their jobs.

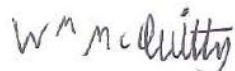
In addition, the APA Executive Board requests additional and clearer guidance on a number of issues:

- Will non-bargaining staff who are exposed to the virus, but are not too sick to work, be able to use Ad Hoc Telecommuting and/or special Covid-19 leave while in isolation?
- Will non-bargaining staff who test positive for the virus, but are not too sick to work, be able to use Ad Hoc Telecommuting and/or special COVID leave while in quarantine?
- Will non-bargaining staff who need to be home with children or other family members who are in quarantine be able to use Ad Hoc Telecommuting and/or special Covid-19 leave to work from home and care for their family members?
- Will non-bargaining staff with underlying health conditions or those otherwise considered at high risk to Covid-19 be able to use the Telecommuting Policy as intended to work from home?
- How and when will answers to these questions be communicated?

This is a year when we need to demonstrate extra grace and care for each other. Trusting your employees to complete their crucial responsibilities and providing them with options to minimize exposure to this virus will lessen Covid-19 transmission on campus and in our greater community. It will also create a more positive work environment, strengthen relationships, improve staff morale and engagement while building loyalty to the University.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



William McQuitty
President
APA Executive Board

References

Anderson, D., Bott, J., & Van Der Kley, J. (2021, August 31). *A safe start to the 2021-22 academic year*. Messages. <https://wmich.edu/covid-19/messages>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, December 31). *Covid-19 guidance: Businesses and employers*. Health data Kalamazoo. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

Kalamazoo County Government. (2021, September 9). *CDC Level of Community Transmission in Kalamazoo County*. <https://www.kalcounty.com/hcs/datahub/covid19.php>