

Abdul Malik Ford, President of ASWWU

To all whom this concerns,

I hope that this letter finds you well and that you will strongly consider the contents herein. View this not as a source of feedback, but as a firm declaration of value and faith in our community.

I would like to start by saying that I give my gratitude and thanks for each and every person who poured countless hours into developing and planning our FY21 budget. Having been to a handful of budget consultation group meetings, I can see the crunches that we're in, and the resilience that it will take to overcome this crisis.

With equity in mind, I would like to turn the attention to our students. Specifically to our Black Students, and the students who are struggling with food and housing insecurity, and overall, our most underrepresented groups on campus. What I see allocated in the operating budget pertaining to the support of these students is unsatisfactory. I do not believe that the financial commitments match the energy, essence nor heart of our institutional mission statements that are proudly displayed across the many web pages that we see on a daily basis. We are finding ourselves in such a fragile state of social affairs, and we are disillusioned by a dreamlike orientation towards diversity, equity and inclusion. What university leaders need to do, is truly commit to supporting students.

This goes to say that as a university, this is unacceptable. The students on campus deserve better. They deserve more support, and as you know, we are the universities most valuable asset. We feed an extraordinary portion of our operating budget of \$190,000,000 (FY20). We water the seeds of this institution and maintain its growth yet we are not receiving that same investment. As a student who's been here going on five years, I have seen enough. I have seen enough poster commitments of DEI initiatives and efforts, I have seen enough slogans and campaigns to affirm that us students are "cared about and valued." What I have not seen enough of is financial commitments to go alongside those same slogans, initiatives, and efforts.

Investing \$225,000 into diversity equity and inclusion initiatives in a budget consisting of \$190,000,000 (FY20) feels like a slap in the face. Especially considering that is a mere ~13,07% of the [GEER funding allocation](#) that states "Emergency Support Funds – \$1,721,590 (General Fund-Federal). The purpose of this allocation is to provide emergency support funding in anticipation of continued financial losses and disruption to university operations and student services due to COVID-19. A portion of these funds should be used to maintain student support services for students of color." In the grand scheme of the \$5,456,837 in GEER funding alone, that is a ~4.123% commitment to the students who inarguably need support the most. Upon my inquiry in late August into the Budget Consultation Group discussion surrounding utilizing GEER funds to support Black students, I was informed that that conversation had not yet taken place. Though it eventually happened, that was a frightening realization that conversations surrounding Black students are not integrated into important conversations we are having as a university.

Quickly committing to a retention counselor for Black students instead of the Black mental health counselors we demanded as Black students feels as if our minds are not valued, instead, only the dollars that we contribute to this institution are. To retain is to protect an asset, not to heal the pain, trauma, and hurt that we face on a daily basis. Our souls are tired and hearts heavy, when will the day come when commitments are honored? We've done our part in joining task forces, committees, listening sessions, working groups and meetings. The same sentiments have been echoed down the institutional void that we find ourselves trapped in. It's time to wake up. There is no justification for performative statements, actions, and commitments similar to how there's no moral justification to passing a tuition increase in the midst of a pandemic. Students are not the cash cows that institutions of higher education mark us out to be, we are the living, breathing future and we should be invested into as if that's the case, the future of this university depends on **us**.

This is to say that our operating budget is incomplete, and it will always be incomplete until our Black students, and other severely underrepresented students are championed for and whose proclaimed support is represented in our budget.

I, Abdul Malik Ford, President of the Associated Students of Western Washington University, strongly oppose presenting this budget to our board of trustees for approval until true commitments are placed forth and financially honored.

In the name of Diversity Equity, and Inclusion, We can do better.