

Testimony of Claire Thiele
Board of Regents Public Forum on the University Budget
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Cancer. Heart disease. Diabetes. These diseases, and a host of others, affect everyone, young and old, rich and poor. And treatments for all of these diseases have been found thanks to research conducted on animals. My name is Claire Thiele, and I am a lab animal attendant here at the U and a member of Teamsters local 320. I am responsible for the ethical maintenance and care of a variety of animals, following strict guidelines that vary greatly between species, labs, and projects. By providing animal husbandry services, we allow researchers to focus on finding cures, and high animal care standards are vital to ensure that the data obtained is reliable and reproducible. But my colleagues and I find ourselves understaffed and underpaid. My department is currently trying to fill nine job openings, which represents twelve percent of our workforce. If our work isn't done properly, it not only hurts the animals but jeopardizes months or years of potentially lifesaving research, and next week we have a major inspection that we need to pass to keep our accreditation.

The work we do is physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing, and essential to the research done at the U. Yet we are among the lowest paid of the frontline staff here. We make under fifteen dollars an hour on average, and that encourages our best employees to seek higher paying jobs as soon as they can. Meanwhile my remaining coworkers and I covet our weekend overtime shifts, because without them we couldn't cover our bills. Many of my colleagues have second jobs too, working part time in the evenings before finally getting home thirteen hours or more after they left. For me, my most modest dreams have

been put on hold. Marriage, family, and home ownership are not in the question when you're cutting a 1998 Mazda protégé out of your budget on the advice of your financial planner.

A strong research program brings prestige to the university, attracts higher caliber students, and attracts researchers and their grant money. The U is making many investments in becoming a stronger research institution, putting up new buildings with state of the art laboratory equipment. The university presumably seeks to attract world class researchers, but I ask that they not forget the value of the frontline staff serving those researchers. Underestimating our value is a disservice to the RAR employees, to the researchers, to the animals, and it's a disservice to the good reputation of this institution. In an email received by all faculty staff and students yesterday, President Kaler said that the daily contributions of faculty and staff make us among the very best research institutions in the nation. I completely agree, but in order for that to continue, we need to be compensated fairly.