

February 28, 2025

Carol Folt, President

Andrew Guzman, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Suzanne Nora Johnson, Chair, USC Board of Trustees

Stacy Giwa, Senior Vice President, Human Resources

University of Southern California

ADM George Finley Bovard Administration Building and Kenneth Norris Jr. Auditorium

3551 Trousdale Parkway

Los Angeles, CA 90089

Dear President Folt, Provost Guzman, Board of Trustees, and Vice President of Human Resources Giwa,

On behalf of the USC Staff Assembly, representing over 12,500 non-union, benefits eligible staff, we write to address the recent changes to the Tuition Assistance Benefits (TAB) program.

This program is a cornerstone of support for countless Trojans past, present, and future, fostering a legacy of unity, opportunity, and shared values that define our institution and our Trojan family. The TAB program has created generations of Trojans and has long been instrumental in employee retention and morale, offering a critical benefit that offsets wage disparities.

The following modifications fundamentally alter the program and create new limitations that directly impact the educational opportunities available to employees and their families:

- **Graduate Degrees for Dependent Children**- No longer covered.
- **Age Cap for Dependent Children** – Dependent children age cap decreased to 26 (from 30 or 35 depending on time with the University).
- **Spouse/Partner Coverage** – 25% tuition assistance for a maximum of one degree program (decreased from 50%).
- **Graduate Certificates** – No longer covered for staff.

While this letter is focused primarily on the changes to the TAB program, it must not go unmentioned, that at the same time that these proposed changes were announced, employees were also informed that two other benefits are being eliminated (the fitness incentive) and reduced (the health assessment incentive). With the cost of health insurance increasing and the reduction of these benefits, staff will experience a decrease in their income.



Based on the significant volume of concerns raised by staff since these changes were announced by USC Benefits and HR representatives during the October 2024 Ad Hoc meeting, Staff Assembly asserts that the elimination and reduction of specific benefits are in conflict with the University's stated values.

Impact on USC Values

The Tuition Assistance Benefits (TAB) program has long been a cornerstone of USC's commitment to integrity, excellence, equity, and community well-being. By enabling access to education, it has strengthened the Trojan community and fostered opportunities for generations of employees and their families.

The proposed changes, however, represent a departure from these values. They risk eroding trust, diminishing opportunities for advancement, and leaving employees questioning whether their efforts and work are truly valued. Below, we outline how these changes conflict with USC's stated unifying values:

Integrity

Integrity requires transparency, fairness, and ethical decision-making. The sudden and unanticipated nature of these changes has already disrupted long-term educational plans for employees and their families—especially those who intended to pursue graduate education, including certificate programs that are no longer covered, or relying on the previous dependent age cap. These decisions were made without meaningful input from the broader university community or adequate explanation, fostering confusion and eroding trust in leadership.

Excellence

USC has built its reputation as a leader in adopting best practices and promoting inclusivity. However, justifying these changes by citing alignment with peer institutions—without providing a transparent or thorough comparison—fails to uphold this standard. Retaining the current TAB benefits would reaffirm USC's commitment to setting the standard for excellence, rather than following others.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The TAB program has been a critical tool for fostering equity and expanding access to education, particularly for employees from lower-income backgrounds. By supporting advanced education and enabling opportunities for dependents, it has helped level the playing field for many families. The proposed changes, however, disproportionately impact those who rely on these benefits the most—employees pursuing graduate certificates and those with children now limited by the age cap and the elimination of access to graduate degrees. These changes risk exacerbating inequities and undermine USC's stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Well-Being

USC claims to prioritize individual and community well-being when shaping policies, yet these changes have created significant uncertainty and financial hardship for employees and their families. This directly contradicts the principle of well-being. A genuine commitment to this value would have included meaningful consultation with staff and faculty through open dialogue to anticipate such negative outcomes. Instead, the lack of collaboration has left employees feeling overlooked and unsupported.

Open Communication

The principle of open communication requires transparency and inclusivity, and proactive dialogue in decision-making. Announcing significant changes during two virtual meetings with limited attendance—and without prior consultation or a clear rationale—falls short of this standard.

The lack of communication has left employees with unanswered questions, misinformation, and a growing sense of distrust in leadership. Further, the announcement of these TAB changes was not effectively communicated to all staff. In our General Assembly meeting at the end of October, an informal poll of the roughly 500 attendees revealed that nearly 50% had not been informed of these changes prior to the meeting, underscoring the inadequacy of the communication process.

Accountability

USC has committed to addressing challenges openly and responsibly, yet these changes shift the burden of financial pressures onto employees and their families—many of whom already face lower wages compared to peer institutions. This approach is neither fair nor reflective of a culture of accountability.

The TAB program has long been instrumental in employee retention and morale, offering a critical benefit that offsets these wage disparities. Since the announcement of these changes, we have witnessed a significant decline in morale, with employees voicing frustration, hurt, and anger. As representatives of staff, we feel obligated to convey these sentiments, along with the undue burden placed on us to interpret and communicate these changes to our colleagues in the absence of clear and consistent messaging from leadership.

We Urge You to Reinstate the TAB program.

We respectfully call on leadership to reinstate the current TAB program without modifications and to commit to codifying these benefits for all current and former employees. These changes have further eroded trust, damaged employee morale, and undermined the organizational culture USC has worked hard to cultivate.

Additionally, we strongly recommend removing the following paragraph from the 15-year letter:

“The University’s tuition assistance policy currently in effect and outlined above is subject to change at any time by the University, at its discretion, without prior notice or liability for such changes.”

Staff have expressed feeling unheard, as there has been no meaningful opportunity to discuss these changes directly with leadership. President Folt and Provost Guzman have met with the Academic Senate, and we hope that they will commit to meet with the Staff Assembly soon to ensure staff voices are acknowledged and included in this critical conversation.

To provide a clearer picture of how deeply these changes are impacting the staff community, we have attached the feedback the Assembly has collected through our confidential, online form and unresolved questions and unaddressed comments we received during both the Ad-Hoc and General Assembly meetings in October 2024. These comments reflect the frustration, concerns and emotional toll felt by employees across the university.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response and remain hopeful for a resolution that reflects the best interests of the Trojan community.

Sincerely,
USC Staff Assembly

Stacey Croomes, President, USC Staff Assembly

Rory O'Neill Schmitt, Ph.D., Vice President, USC Staff Assembly

Stacy Patterson, Parliamentarian, USC Staff Assembly

Phillip Turner, Secretary, USC Staff Assembly

Addenda:

1. Staff Assembly Feedback form
2. October 25 - Zoom Q&A
3. October 18 and October 25 – Zoom Chat

cc: Beong-Soo Kim, Senior Vice President, General Counsel, and Interim President (Summer 2025)

Addendum #1

The following is a list of tuition-benefits related comments, submitted via the Staff Assembly "Feedback Form" found on the Staff Assembly website (<https://staffassembly.usc.edu/staff-assembly-survey/>), between October 18th, 2024 and February 27th, 2025. Staff Assembly has reviewed over 78 detailed survey responses, and compiled 37 tuition-benefits-related responses.

These comments appear as originally submitted, with the only edits being the redaction of personally identifiable information.

I can't believe USC is getting rid of the 15-year service tuition benefit!!!! I have been at USC for 13 years, hoping to rely on this benefit for my child one day. You're getting rid of it to save \$3.2 mil. And President Folt approved this?!?! \$3.2 m in savings is a drop in the bucket to incentivize good staff/faculty to stay. Absolutely disappointing.

While I understand that the TAB benefit was never a guarantee, I think it is abhorrent the way the decision to end the TAB benefit was made and announced. Many of us who began prior to July 2011 are within 1 year of earning our letter. Further, for all those employees who have left the university thinking their 15 years of service would be honored it is disgraceful to end this benefit without greater input from the university at large. This is unconscionable and at a time when we are touting giant football facilities, outrageously paid coaches, and the Big10 move, it's outrageous that you would "save money" at the cost of so many of us who have committed our careers to this institution. It was already shameful that you deducted maternity & paternity leave from our tenure toward this benefit but the hope many of us had of sending our children to this top tier institution is now dead. Every institution provides some TAB benefit. What made USC unique and worth commuting to all the way in South LA was the investment in my children's future. I guarantee you see an exodus of long term, dedicated

staff as a result of this decision. And for Folt to approve this - a president committed to "students first" - it's shameful.

This morning at the Staff Assembly meeting, several changes to staff and faculty benefits were announced. Each was disheartening, but the modification to the Tuition Assistance Benefit for staff with 15 years of service has left me questioning whether USC truly values its employees as much as it claims to.

For many of us, the promise of tuition assistance for our children after years of dedicated service was a key reason we chose to commit to USC long-term. My six-year-old daughter and three-year-old son have grown up knowing they would one day become Trojans like me. I have always seen myself spending my entire professional career at this university. Now I am reconsidering my future. This decision, along with others, sends the message that USC no longer values the dedication and loyalty of its long-serving staff.

When you became USC's president, you were charged with changing the university's culture. Through the Culture Journey initiative, the USC community identified ""Unifying Values"" to guide the future of this institution. Today's announcement goes directly against those values:

-Integrity: "We do what we say we will do." By altering this benefit, USC has not honored the commitment it made to long-term staff and faculty, a promise that many of us relied on when planning our careers and our children's futures.

-Open Communication: "We strive for consistent and timely communications." Announcing such a significant change via a proxy, in a last-minute Staff Assembly Zoom meeting with limited attendance, feels dismissive of the staff's importance and undermines the principle of transparency.

It deeply saddens me to say that I no longer feel the same pride in being part of the Trojan Family. This change further undermines the trust we had in USC's leadership and our shared commitment to the university's future.

I am writing regarding USC's potential retraction of the TAB (tuition assistance) benefit for grandfathered employees. I am an alumna of usc having graduated in

2003 and spending my ENTIRE career since then, working in fundraising for various schools at USC, raising millions of dollars in funding for need and merit-based scholarships, building campaigns, professorships, emergency aid, etc. While I could have taken many other opportunities for employment elsewhere over the last 20+ years, USC's tuition assistance benefit for those of us who started before 2011, is what kept me on campus and growing in my career. I have three small children, none of which are close to college age yet, but am a grandfathered employee for this benefit and one day hope to be able to draw upon the benefit. And though USC's wages have never been the best across the higher ed landscape, I always loved knowing that in my back pocket - through literally decades of hard work and loyalty - that I had earned my children at least the opportunity of a possible loan-free college degree.

The fact that this benefit is now in jeopardy is a complete BAIT and SWITCH on the part of the university. USC recruited and retained many of us with a stated promise - that we would have a tuition free option for our children if we worked and stayed committed to USC for 15+ years. As an external facing employee working with principal and major gift prospects in my role, I have defended USC through scandal after scandal. I have also fundraised tirelessly to help raise money for the affordability act offering free tuition to those families making less than \$80k per year. The irony that we are offering free tuition to these families and taking it away from those of us connected to USC as faculty/staff who have worked to check all the boxes to EARN it is absolutely disgusting.

To bait and switch this benefit on us, is truly despicable and the lowest form of employee treatment, all while outwardly spewing about unifying values and ensuring a positive culture for all Trojans and our supposed "family." If USC removes this benefit for grandfathered employees, you are literally turning you back on those of us who were loyal, worked hard to support the institution over the last several decades and who did everything we were supposed to do to earn this benefit.

I respectfully demand that staff assembly unite with academic senate to hold USC to their stated promises. Those of us impacted will be LOUD about this. You are literally taking from my children...your own Trojan children. Do better, USC.

I was unable to attend the Staff Assembly meeting this past Friday 10/18 because of a work event but I heard that USC has decided to eliminate the 15 year TAB benefit. I am extremely upset by this news and disappointed in the university for this decision. As someone who has been at USC for 19 years and is grandfathered into the program, I have been working with the understanding that this was a benefit that I would have access to. Though I have been contacted numerous times for other job opportunities, this benefit and what the university used to represent in its care for the Trojan family were vital in my choice to stay and dedicate my life and work to USC all these years. This benefit has impacted financial decisions that my family has made as we have considered how to save our money for our daughter's future. Additionally, my daughter, who is currently a high school freshman, has dreamt of going to USC her entire life and has been working extremely hard toward this goal. While I am aware that USC reserves the right to amend the program, I never expected the university to make such an unethical decision, one which highlights how little the university values its employees.

It was brought to my attention that the university is planning to retract the tuition assistance benefit for current and former employees who have served 15+ years. I am a former employee who devoted 16 years (plus - I was an employee when I was a student, too!) to USC in various roles. I had the honor of serving on the Staff Assembly when I was an employee. I am a double alumnus, my husband is double alumnus, and we are both donors to the university. He is one of 15 family members who have attended USC. Our daughter has aspirations to attend USC, and the reversal of this policy is unfathomable.

I am appalled that the university has determined to try and fix their financial challenges on the backs of current and former employees who have dedicated their time and were in no certain words promised and recruited to the university with this benefit. Regardless of the language included in our "15-year letters", the fact remains that human resources representatives indicated that this tuition benefit would be available for our use. Why provide a letter at all, if you aren't going to honor this benefit?

As an employee I also served on the USC Culture Journey, having helped develop and implement the unifying values. Those making this decision have forgotten many of these values - accountability, open communication, and integrity came to mind immediately when I heard about this decision. The university is quick to spout they value their employees, but actions speak louder than words. The university does not value its employees, it does not value its commitments, and it had no intention of directly communicating with former employees for which this decision would have a huge impact.

I implore Staff Assembly members to fight this change. Partner with Academic Senate and let your voices be heard that the implementation of this new policy will have severe impacts on the most loyal and dedicated members of the Trojan family - its staff. I am willing and ready to participate in any way that I can to help.

I hope there will be further evaluation of the TAB benefits. It was shocking to learn that the earned 15-Year Service Benefit is being discontinued. This benefit was a significant factor in my decision to stay at USC. Having worked at USC for 20 years, I am disheartened to find out that if I leave USC before my children reach college age, I will lose that benefit.

Many of my colleagues have adjusted their contributions to their children's college funds based on this promised and earned benefit. While I understand the need for cost-saving measures, this appears to conflict with USC's stated core values.

I urge leadership to take these concerns seriously and reassess the TAB benefits for those who have completed over 15 years of service at USC.

I would like to share my great alarm and disdain for discussion of the elimination of TAB, especially for those of us who had received the letter for 15 years of service ensuring that we had access to the TAB regardless of whether we were still active members of the staff or faculty. This seems now to be in jeopardy.

Many people have expressed great concern about this new development and risk of losing this benefit. I have every confidence that the university will suffer

tremendously from such a short-sighted decision. Morale already has fallen to an all-time low and now university leadership are taking away one of the only reasons why people would want to stay and contribute to the university's success. I foresee a great brain drain and mass exodus should leadership implement this threatened change in policy.

What's more there is real confusion about this decision and who it will affect.

Thank you for communicating our concerns to the greater assembly.

It has been brought to my attention that 15-year tuition benefit is in talks of being taken away from employees who have been working at USC since prior to 2011. When I started working at USC in 2009 TAB was one of the benefits that was mentioned and a huge incentive to work at the university. It was removed in 2011, but we were grandfathered in. It was an incentive to continue to work at USC. I have been told that this benefit may be taken away from the people who have worked at USC the longest. I find this to be upsetting and frustrating. I understand that USC has the right to change policies. I'm sure it was written in a way to give USC the option to do so, but I feel like this is really dishonest and a complete let down to the most loyal of employees. To promise something and then just take it away. I hope that this will be reconsidered and will not be removed from those that have dedicated many years to the university.

The changes to benefits affect some people tremendously. Why are they being swept under the rug? Do we care about our employees at all?

I am beyond disappointed in the benefits reductions and rollbacks announced at last Friday's staff assembly. I wonder if any member of central administration, including our general counsel who clearly vetted this, were in attendance to witness the absolute devastation that many folks felt and expressed. I have been at USC for 20 years and even before this announcement I was beginning to be disillusioned by our administration. I've weathered many regime changes, budget cuts, and farcical attempts at culture changes. But this one has been the worst.

Friday's announcement was a complete betrayal and a gut punch to many of us who have stayed loyal to an institution that professed to serve a higher purpose and value its people. People came to USC for stability, benefits that were touted far and wide (and always compared with UCLA's), and because we believed in the mission. But apparently administration has been duping us this whole time into believing that they shared our belief in the mission. One huge betrayal is the changes to tuition assistance. What they've done is held many parents hostage to low-paying, under resourced, and undervalued jobs indefinitely. So they will continue to slog away at their thankless jobs that they probably once enjoyed but now hate because they have lost all faith in and respect for the organization. I'm not even affected by this particular change but I still felt this blow for my colleagues. But I am affected by the increase in our insurance premiums and the further evidence that I am continually asked to make sacrifices while our top-heavy and high-salaried administration sits in its ivory tower. If all of them took a 5-10% pay cut I'll bet they could save more than the measly \$3 million saved from the tuition assistance cut. And that cuts affects thousands. And I strongly suspect this is just the beginning of more cuts to come. We are going to lose so many good and talented people. One has to wonder if administration is actually hoping many people will quit to further help them with a budget crisis of their own making. How about stop paying millions of dollars to consultants to prop up central units (HR, OCISO) that only make our jobs harder and makes us feel even less supported than before they existed? And how about they stop treating us as if we are stupid and lack the ability to see through these PR spins on budget cuts and strategic hiring freezes?

I hope Staff Assembly finds a way to share widely all these changes that were announced in a clear bulleted list. This is a travesty.

As an employee who relies on certain benefits to in order to plan for my financial future, the potential reduction or elimination of these offerings has raised significant concerns for me. These benefits are a crucial part of my overall compensation. Seems that premiums are going up and we are losing benefits that made USC stand out amongst other organizations.

It has been shared with me that the University is planning on eliminating the 15-year tuition assistance program for employees that leave the University. I have worked for the University for 24 years and have relied on the 15-year letter to help fund my kids tuition when they are college age. There are no guarantees that I will still work for USC when my kids do go to college, but the fact that I committed to the 15 years for that purpose is disheartening that it could be taken away from me.

I used to love working for USC and thought it was an amazing institution to be employed by. But over the years, I have felt a shift- employees are not valued the way they used to be and our value is sacrificed to pay their bills. Our 403C retirement was cut from double-investment to matching, health insurance costs have increased significantly and the University continues to spend millions of dollars on scandalous lawsuits and social unrest.

I am extremely concerned by the impending benefits cut, especially the TAB and the way it was "announced". Very disheartening and bad for morale. If I am in the middle of using a benefit and it is being abruptly taken away, why would I even continue working for the organization? This looks like the underhanded backstabbing practices of the Nikias era. Shameful!

I am really upset about the slashing of all the benefits for staff members. I have been a diligent worker and staff member for the last 3 years, there are thousands of us working here who are depending on these benefits for their health, their education, and their children's/family's wellbeing. Why has the university increased the requirements for having a tuition waiver benefit to 15 years and continuous work? Why cut the spousal tuition benefit to 25%? Is it true that they are not going to include graduate programs for the free tuition benefit for staff? Will I lose my chance to go to graduate school and better myself and even improve in my own job because i don't have access to graduate school? This is really sad, and out of the blue. I think about the thousands of other employees who were counting on this tuition benefit who may be in even more precarious positions than myself. These are some of the biggest benefits of working here,

and its the reason why many employees stay 10, 15, 20 years. It makes me less motivated to work here if all of these benefits are cut off, and its as if no one cares about us. Most of us work here because we are passionate about our jobs, we like our coworkers and community, and we feel proud to be a Trojan! It seems like USC doesn't care for us, or support us though we have been here day after day and year after year. Please relay this to the USC Administration, because they have hurt alot of people with this decision.

Employment benefits and compensation are a contract between employees and the university. These compensation packages play a crucial role in deciding whether or not to work at the university. It is unthinkable that USC is reneging on its grandfathered policy, which allows your child(ren) to remain eligible for tuition assistance even if you leave the university. This benefit is a significant part of our compensation package and was one of the reasons I chose to work at USC. It is a slap in the face to employees who have dedicated 20-plus years of service to the university.

The current benefit changes that are ongoing are extremely frustrating, but the absolute infuriating change is that after over 17 years of working for the university and both figuratively and physically giving my blood, sweat and tears to USC, the tuition remission program is being removed after I have already earned the opportunity to provide educational freedom to my children. As a USC alum who utilized the same program and has worked for the university for so long, to have that pulled away is a punch in the gut. With both 7 and 10 year old intelligent children who desire to make it to SC, if I now have to continue to actively work at USC for the benefit, this requires me to stay employed for an additional 7 to 10 years until my children could even apply!

Both my wife an I are USC employees, her even longer than I, and we always joked that after 15 years we had our ""Golden Handcuffs"" removed, but now I guess they are back on.

Financially, I have planned my life around my children being able to utilize this gracious benefit to reduce long term debt to my family for education costs.

If USC isn't going to stand behind their promise to support us and honor the work we have put in, the fact that we have bleed Cardinal and Gold, I have to question why we would want to support USC and continue to work diligently for the university. I will feel completely abandoned.

Considering USC's unifying values of Integrity, Excellence, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, Well Being, Open Communication, Accountability and Integrity, this move in my mind goes against numerous of those values.

USC needs to reexamine this decision, because if this is fully instated, I will have lost all confidence in the university and will likely start looking for better opportunities for employment elsewhere.

We have EARNED the benefit that what was offered to us through hard work for the university. Taking this away now lacks class.

This is an abomination.....Do what is RIGHT USC!

This is not directed to Staff Assembly but is meant to be openly addressed by university leadership to all of us. We need better communication and transparency. Where is our focus on well-being? Why are we lowering our benefits down to match peers through benchmarking? Shouldn't we aim to outshine peers and be an institution to which others aspire and want to be belong? Were salaries and cost of living part of the benchmarking, too? The recently announced TAB reductions are the most incredibly disappointing change and are misaligned with USC's unifying values. The longest-time employees of USC, those who were hired long before 2009 and have been dedicated to USC for much of their professional lives, if not their entire careers, have been directly slapped in the face. I have long been a vocal champion and staunch advocate for USC, encouraging many to apply and join the Trojan Family. Despite past controversies, we have stood behind the mission of the university and the USC culture of taking care of one another, before this. I understand tough decisions have to be made when finances are an issue, but this change was the wrong decision. The excuse of this "only" affecting 15% (of what?) but saving the university \$3mm is a horrible rationale. Because a change was made to TAB in 2011, there is a short runway of families who would still be able to use this

benefit. Why can't this benefit continue to be available to those who were grandfathered? I am hurt by what the university has done to me, as a current staff member of more than 25 years and also to my former colleagues who had committed decades of service to USC. We have forgone other, more high paying opportunities to stay at USC. We have had family financial planning that had factored into account these benefits. I am shocked and especially saddened and embarrassed by the decision to take away TAB for dependents of 15+ year employees who separate from the university. This has taken away choice and ruins employee morale. What is the incentive to work as hard as we have anymore? This is a betrayal to us and our families. Moreover, we are mortified by the decision to eliminate graduate degree support along with reducing the maximum age of dependents to receive TAB. The university is hard enough to get into as it is, and now the graduate path is no longer even an option to be part of the Trojan Family?! Slap after slap after slap. So many of us have stood by USC through some of its worst times, and this is what you thought would be right? Please be more transparent on what are the biggest cost drivers. Why is the university spending so much? Why are we taking on exorbitant costs through various new programs that have not been well thought through and facilities like the DC building and medical practices that are not up to USC standards? Why do we spend so much on hires for University senior leadership, Advancement and Athletics positions, events and parties to wine and dine donors and guests, and central operations that do not seem to be realizing real, tangible returns for staff and faculty on the ground? Are you going to drastically increase our salaries? I wholeheartedly support scholarships, but now USC is the most expensive institution for undergraduate students and the tuition and fees are unbelievably high. Why is that? How can we justify handing out millions upon millions of dollars to so many of those who have no affiliation with USC? They have jumped on the bandwagon. We should help those who could not otherwise attend USC, which are many, but why are we completely ignoring middle-class families, including staff members, who are struggling and have multiple children in school trying to earn degrees, too? They will not be able to be Trojans themselves. With these decisions, I hear from more and more people who don't want to be here and don't feel compelled to give our hearts to USC anymore. It feels like USC keeps chipping away at those most loyal and those who serve tirelessly and have dedicated their lives here, and now the Trojan family on the ground is getting

stabbed in the back by our own leadership. It is disheartening, disappointing and not what USC should be. Tears of sadness are flowing here and from many families for our lost futures. Please reconsider and make better decisions for and with the entire Trojan Family.

I was deeply saddened, disappointed, and angered to learn about the university's recent decision to retroactively take away several of the tuition assistance benefits for staff. As an employee who has been with the university for over 20 years, I've seen USC go through ups and downs, scandals, embarrassments, and bad looks, but as a dedicated employee, I have never wavered from my support of the university. I have long believed in the people who make up this extraordinary institution as well as the work that we do to improve the lives of students, our community, and society at large.

For the first time ever, my belief of the university that I have loved so much has been shaken. Some of USC's proudest supporters are the staff who have been here for the long haul, which makes it ever more hurtful that university leadership has decided to turn their backs on us. I started at USC in 2003 when I was 27, and I made \$32,000 a year. I wasn't married and wasn't even thinking about having children, yet the thought of possibly being able to one day offer my potential children this incredible gift – assistance in covering either an undergraduate degree, or if they preferred, a graduate degree – to support their higher education goals, was hugely attractive and a significant part of the benefits package that USC offered in light of such a small salary. Now the dream I was sold over 20 years ago has been crushed.

I do have kids now – they are in ninth and seventh grade. We talk about college a lot. I know how difficult it is to get into USC as an undergraduate. I've watched the university's trajectory during my time here, which is why I was counting on being able to offer my kids the opportunity, if they wanted it, to apply to USC for a graduate degree. My heart breaks that I can no longer offer them this option. They have grown up around USC. They work hard in school because of USC. They love USC, and the graduate degree option was real for them.

Retroactively taking away this dependent TAB benefit (along with several others) is a short-term answer to the university's bigger budget problems. As a higher education institution, we should be promoting higher education, not penalizing dedicated staff like me and so many others who have given their careers to USC. What Culture Journey are we on? What does USC Competes even mean? When you treat the people who have worked here for decades in this manner, it becomes clear that the Moonshots and culture conversations we've spent years having are purely for show. USC Competes - as long as it makes USC look good. How about we take down the wall around campus instead? Spending millions of dollars so that we don't encounter another media faux pas, while cutting real benefits that people have been counting on for years to save a relatively insignificant amount of the university's budget is soul crushing to those of us who are affected. Not to mention that wall goes against our true community and culture values. Those of us who have been here a long time know we embrace the community around USC, we don't block it out.

The decision to take away tuition assistance benefits that were sold to us as a major part of our benefits package when we started our employment at the university is wrong. Whether it's legal or not, it certainly isn't ethical. Why you would do this is beyond my comprehension and I'm having trouble finding words strong enough to urge the university to reconsider. We need to hear from university leadership – specifically President Folt – on this issue. I would also like to know Staff Assembly's action items to raise this with administration.

I have questions regarding the TAB benefit change.

I have just viewed the Staff assembly video recording from the meeting on Friday. Can you please clarify TAB policy on Graduate degrees for children. Of course I'm upset about the changes, but want to actually make sure I understand the changes. My son didn't apply to USC as an undergraduate with hopes of using our TAB benefit for his graduate degree. He is hoping to enter a graduate program this coming Fall and he just turned 25. How does this affect him directly? When I look on the website, it looks as though his degree would be covered, but I can't tell what changes are happening. Please be as clear as possible with me, as this really affects what he chooses to do in the next few months. I am a current

employee with no plans to leave USC during the time that he would be earning his degree.

I have several thoughts on the change to the TAB policy.

I think that it is outrageous that USC would retroactively renege on its commitment to employees with 15 plus years of experience. Employees factored this benefit into their career choices and salary considerations. From a moral standpoint, it amounts to theft.

By not allowing staff to use the benefit for graduate certificates and by not allowing qualified dependents to use the benefit for graduate degrees, the University is assaulting our supposed shared commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. These changes will have a disproportionate impact on working class, often black and brown, staff who are less likely to find their children admissible to the increasingly competitive undergraduate programs. The reduction in age eligibility from 35 to 26 will also have such an impact as working class students often take longer to progress through the educational pipeline.

The University should never again use the expression ""Trojan Family"" in its communications and the ""Unifying Values"" should immediately be edited to exclude a commitment to ""diversity, equity, and inclusion"" as the hypocritical inclusion of this is just another of the many embarrassments that those of us who have multiple USC degrees, family members with USC degrees, and decades of service to the University have been exposed to in recent years.

It was clear from the Staff Assembly meeting today that the assembly is disappointed in the university's proposed changes to the TAB, and I appreciate that. I did want to add my voice to the many who are angry at the university's decision to rescind their commitment, in case you're counting numbers.

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the recent decision to cut benefits for university staff members who are grandfathered under the previous tuition policy.

As a fundraiser at USC Marshall for 14.5 years, I have dedicated the most productive years of my career, and my adult life, to supporting USC and its mission. I have also made significant life choices based on the promise of this tuition benefit for my children.

Specifically, I considered leaving the workforce to provide more hands-on support for my two deaf children while I was an employee at USC, but the opportunity for them to attend USC tuition free (especially for a graduate degree) if they could earn their acceptance served as a motivating and aspirational gift I could offer them. This benefit encouraged me to remain committed to my role here, to model strong work ethic, integrity, show the value our family places in higher education, and to demonstrate that good things come with hard work and sacrifice. It breaks my heart to know this benefit will no longer be available to them- and that I made such a sensitive judgement about how to best apply my time and resources during these important years, based on a promise that will not be honored. Furthermore, it is too late for me to reverse course as both daughters have finished their early school years when my time at home could have made a significant impact. It is particularly hurtful because it is something we talk about frequently as a family, and I don't even know how I will share this disappointing news with my oldest daughter.

I have actively discussed educational aspirations with my daughters since they were young, fostering dreams of attending USC if they could overcome major hurdles in early years. I have invested time and energy into a promise that may no longer come to fruition- and walked away from other opportunities that could have served my family better if I had fully understood the circumstances. If I had known we would not be eligible for this benefit, I likely would have stayed home with them instead. I have also walked away from significant job opportunities with other institutions with this benefit in mind.

Separately, as a fundraiser, I have worked diligently to model ethical leadership, trustworthiness, transparency, and to preserve important donor relationships during challenging times for the university. This has not always been easy.

For the last 14 years, I have earned and maintained the trust of many of the school's top donors. By extension, I care deeply about USC's financial health and the strength of our most important relationships. The school's relationship with dedicated staff should also receive the same courtesy and care. I love my work on behalf of USC, but feel so hurt and discouraged by this decision and the lack of transparency.

I respectfully ask that USC may reconsider this policy change, given the significant financial and emotional impact on employees like me, who have invested deeply in our own relationships with USC, and made major life and career decisions based on the promise of these benefits. To revoke these benefits now, without warning, might be legal but it is definitely not ethical.

I think it is an absolute travesty that the university has decided to ignore its promises and revoke the tuition benefits for dependents for those who have worked for USC for 15 years. We lived up to our end of the bargain, but the university is not living up to theirs. In making this decision they also completely ignored their own purported values (likely paid for with millions of dollars to consulting firms that would probably pay for this benefit at least two times over).

"We act with integrity in the pursuit of excellence." There is no integrity to this decision because it ignores promises made for over a decade, and it is a race to the bottom, not to a pursuit of excellence. Saying that 'peer institutions' don't have this benefit does NOT justify this decision, it makes it worse. You can't even identify which institutions, nor does doing what everyone else does equal excellence.

"We embrace diversity, equity and inclusion and promote well-being." This decision adds a ton of unneeded stress to employees lives who did not think they needed to save hundreds of thousands of dollars for a college education, and in some cases completely eliminates the ability of families to send their children to college. This also does not an inclusive decision because it absolutely affects those of lower socio-economic backgrounds far more than those in higher ones. Some

of these people would never have the ability or earning potential to send their children to USC and this benefit would have allowed for that. It's truly ghastly and immoral.

"We engage in open communication and are accountable for living our Values." Talking about this in a staff assembly meeting, which did not have their minutes posted for months, does NOT qualify as open communication. Quite the opposite. This is an attempt to slip the decision past the staff who it affects with the idea that once it's announced it will be too late. Also there has been no effort at all to notify those who no longer work for the university who have obtained the 15 year letter. It's disgusting and I feel deep shame that the university that I attended and have spent 18 years working for is attempting to do this to the staff. It is absolutely unacceptable behavior from people who put us in a hole financially and then expect everyone but themselves to be held accountable. "

Employee benefits are a crucial consideration for both current and prospective employees when deciding to remain with or join an organization. Personally, although the compensation I accepted upon being hired was lower than what I could have earned elsewhere, I chose to join USC because the benefits for both myself and, more importantly, my children, more than compensated for the financial difference. Now, with the imminent, sweeping, and significant changes to our benefits, many USC staff and faculty households will face financial instability, all unfolding during a time marked by deep political divisions, economic inequality, and widespread financial uncertainty.

I am profoundly disappointed and saddened by USC leadership's decision to implement these cuts. Coming from a family that once could only dream of attending a university like USC, and finally having the opportunity to give my children a real chance to become students at such a prestigious institution, the alterations to the Tuition Assistance Program are especially devastating and, frankly, cruel. Additionally, it seems likely that those in leadership positions responsible for these changes will remain unaffected, bearing a far lighter

financial burden compared to those of us who already struggle to meet the basic income standards required to live in California.

I had believed USC was different—that USC cared for its employees and their families. But now, I am no longer certain of that.

I'm encouraged to learn that some of the feedback provided about the TAB benefits has been used to reverse course. However, I hope that more protections can be put in place for those who have already received their 15-year letter. This letter isn't applicable to me but I really feel for colleagues who have made life decisions based on that commitment. I would also encourage leadership to announce any future changes about tuition benefits with much more notice. An announcement in October 2024 for a change effective summer 2025 doesn't allow for people to change their strategies for applications and financial aid. A full year's lead time should be the minimum.

USC removing support for graduate programs without warning or any grandfather clause has left me angry and looking at financial stress next year. My child was just applying for a master program at USC. It's too late to take advantage of tuition assistance for his undergraduate degree. I told him to study and do well so he could be accepted to USC for a graduate degree. Now I have to disappoint him. I'm not in a position at USC to pay tuition myself. The decision USC made is not going to hurt people in executive positions, but it will hurt those of us who make the university run. I'm very disappointed and frustrated. I am now aware USC can and will take away any benefits without regard to who it hurts. I'll expect more of that in the future.

I am so disappointed in the university and the recent changes it made to TAB. When I was hired in 2005, TAB was a significant competitive advantage that motivated me to work here over other organizations, as well as an important incentive to reward those of us actively demonstrating the long-term commitment we made to work at USC to attain 15 years of service. I felt vested in

this cherished benefit. It is so painful to know now that I have given so many years of my life to the university that it could take away something so important to me, which I have built my life around, in an instant. The feeling I am left with is regret for choosing the 18+ years a USC over something perhaps more fulfilling.

I have a number of questions and comments regarding the cancellation of TAB, and the communications from 10/29/2024 and 11/20/2024:

What is the financial impact of the Tyndall settlements to USC's yearly operational budget, and why are staff benefits being leveraged to offset any shortfalls the settlement may have caused? The failure was the responsibility of leadership, and should not fall on staff to pay for, not one cent. (Accountability)

What is the Financial Planning and Resilience initiative? When was this group formed, and when was it communicated to the USC community? How does this group take into consideration the recommendations from EBAC? What is the charge, and scope, and structure of this initiative? Who holds a seat at this table? What data was considered, and what report was produced? (Open Communication, Excellence)

Why was the 15-year letter cancelled without written notification to current and former staff? Why have former staff still not been contacted regarding the TAB changes, despite explicit promises made by Stacy Giwa in the October 18th, 2024 Ad-Hoc Staff Assembly Meeting to do exactly that? (Open Communication, Integrity, Excellence)

Who were the final recommendations of EBAC 2024 taken to? Did EBAC recommend these TAB cancellations, or was it decided by another group/person? Why patronize us with seats on a benefits advisory committee if you don't take their recommendations into consideration, or if you've already made the decision beforehand? (Integrity)

What groups outside of leadership were consulted during the decision making process, but BEFORE, the final decision was made? (Open Communication, Integrity, Excellence)

What is the projected impact, year over year, of TAB benefits provided specifically to the dependents of staff members, and what proportion of that amount is paid for post-employment dependents? (Open Communication, Excellence)

What is the breakdown of projected costs of TAB for FY26 for each specific component of TAB that was initially cancelled (graduate degrees, age cap, 15-year letter, graduate certificates)? (Open Communication, Excellence)

How many TAB eligible dependents have applied for graduate degrees, year over year for the past 10 years, and what is the percentage that were accepted? How many graduate degrees have been conferred over the history of the TAB program? (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)

How many TAB eligible dependents have applied for undergraduate degrees, year over year for the past 10 years, and what is the percentage that were accepted? How many undergraduate degrees have been conferred over the history of the TAB program? (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)

What is the percentage of current and former staff that have already utilized this benefit when compared against the number who haven't yet utilized it?

Why were such massive changes never officially communicated in writing, but instead through two capped-attendance meetings? (Open Communication)

Why does leadership continue to hide from staff? (Accountability)

What's next, our retirement match? (Open Communication, Excellence, Wellbeing)

I am disheartened. More than I have ever been in my 21 years at USC. What is the reason for all these cuts? And why is this information presented in such a casual way? There was no indication change of this magnitude was coming, I expected a repeat of info I knew, just as in previous years. Where is leadership? Where is President Folt or Provost Guzman? Instead we get a Finance leadership guy who clearly drew the short straw to deliver the news as a fait accompli.

I go back to the why. I see no other universities making these drastic cuts, is it because we are paying for all the scandals? Is the move to the Big 10 part of the reason? Give us a true reason that is not cloaked in spin and fog.

Someone brought up that this is a class issue and I agree. Leadership's kids will not be affected, they'll go to USC, but mine will not, and frankly speaking they will do better to go elsewhere. I never thought I'd say that--I am an alum and I had hoped they would be Trojans, but no more.

"This submission is in response to the information shared at the October 18 Ad-Hoc Staff Assembly meeting regarding upcoming changes to my benefits as a USC staff member. I want to be very clear that this message is directed to the university's senior leadership who approved these changes and is in no way a critique of the efforts of Staff Assembly representatives who are on the ground advocating for USC employees.

Tuition Assistance Benefit

I started working at USC after the July 1, 2011 change to the 15-year service benefit, so I am sharing my thoughts on this as an ally to those it affects. Not issuing any new 15-year service letters after Summer 2025 is an absolute gut-punch to those who were expecting to receive it. This is effectively changing the cut-off date to 2010 and that does not even take into consideration the fact that leave time does not count towards your years of service. Depending on the number and/or length of leaves, a staff member who started prior to July 1, 2011 earlier could still be working towards their 15 years. I recognize that the benefit may need to adapt and there are complicated financial situations behind it. But still, this feels like a big miss by university leadership. Everyone who started working for USC prior to July 1, 2011, should receive their 15-year service benefit, full stop. Just because university leadership can change the terms of this program does not mean that they should. Again, this is a huge miss and error in judgment on the part of university leadership, and I hope that it is reconsidered.

During the session, many attendees expressed dismay that these benefit changes, on top of the pressures we all have been feeling as positions are not being filled,

work is increasing, and pay is remaining flat, are not at all in alignment with USC's Unifying Values. I want to echo the sentiments that university leadership is greatly missing the mark when it comes to well-being, open communication, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I have worked in higher education for almost 20 years, so I'm well-acquainted with the fact that funds for operating expenses, compensation, and benefits are not coming from donations and endowments, and that many units here are self-sustaining. But it is incredibly disheartening to open USC News and read about a \$15 million gift to the Frontiers of Computing "moonshot" while on the same day being told that our insurance costs are going up and benefits are being cut. In my own department (I want to note that we generate over \$2.5 million in income each year but don't see all that come back to our budget), we have not been able to fill a vacant position in nearly a year, putting a strain on our very small team since the work still needs to be done. It's disheartening to hear how my manager has to fight tooth and nail every year to get us the maximum raises possible - which are outpaced by the following year's insurance premium increases - when we are consistently exceeding expectations in a highly visible office that impacts the entire student community.

The staff members at USC work hard for this university. We show up to help students succeed, support research, care for patients, and, frankly, change the world, every single day. USC is held in such high regard in the general public, it's disappointing to see behind the curtain how disaffected and disenfranchised staff members feel.

These last several years have been extremely challenging for everyone, with no let up in sight. I hope university leadership finds a way to do better for the people who keep this place running.

I attended the Staff Assembly "Open Enrollment" Meeting Friday and I found it to be extremely disturbing. I am still very confused as to how all of this is going to affect my life and my future here with USC. Tuition Exchange and the 15 year letter were discussed and if I am understanding correctly those are no longer

active benefits that USC staff have access to. Is it possible to schedule a one-on-one as to how all of this will work moving forward?

"Unacceptable what USC is doing to Staff by stripping away benefits. This is a real motivation killer. Why work at USC for low pay when benefits are being eroded away? This is just another example of senior leadership at USC missing the mark, again.

Clueless, they are.

I want to express my deep dissatisfaction and anger about the changes to the health and education benefits that were discussed at the Ad Hoc Staff Assembly meeting on 10/18/2024. As a triple alumni, and 17-year employee of the university, I have always prided myself on my relationship with the school, and care that the Trojan Family has showed for all members.

My strongest feelings are about the changes to the university tuition benefit for dependents. I have spent 17 years of my work life at this institution - through multiple challenging economic times and layoffs, dealing with cumbersome bureaucracy, slim pay raises, paused retirement contributions and a broad "do more with less" attitude. Through it all, the benefit that was dangled was that my dependent would be eligible for the tuition benefit at the time he attended. I fully expected there to be changes to the program - a reduction in the amount covered, for example, or some other programmatic change, so I did what I could to prepare.

In the meantime, my 10 year old has spent his entire life within 10 miles of the UPC campus, and USC is in his blood as the child of two alumni. He started attending the USC daycare when he was 4 months old - and dealt with three massive shifts in ownership while we were there, but we pushed through, because at the end of the tunnel was this great benefit. When he entered kindergarten, we were lucky that he was accepted into a local school where USC

students participate in enrichment events. Our conversations now are peppered with what he's looking forward to about being a USC student the most.

This morning's disclosures came as a drastic shock. To hear that my son who has grown up knowing this place, feeling it in his bones, anticipating the time when he can join as a member of the Trojan Family is no longer going to be supported in attending the school. Over the past 17 years, every time there was a funding setback, or scandal, or a cut, or a hiring freeze, I convinced myself that it would be worth it at the end. I justified the low pay, understaffing and raises that barely covered increasing cost of living with this hope and promise of a tuition benefit, because I knew how much of a difference a good education could make for my son, and how lucky he would be to attend the school, especially because I didn't make enough money to save for his college expenses and live in LA.

If Dr. Folt and the administration want to live up to their promise - they will walk the walk of "USC Competes", and find a way to keep the dedicated faculty, staff and alumni invested in making this university the best it can be, not only for the current students, but for their own children who have been chasing the dream of coming here for years. They will find a way to reward those who have dealt with years of low pay because of the promise of something good at the end. If they don't, or won't try, it will be obvious that the only thing that matters is power - and the moonshots for those who are loud enough to be noticed.

I'm very upset that USC is not keeping their word regarding the Tuition benefit for children of employees who have 15+ years of service. This was promised when I started working at USC in 2006 as a benefit because the university knew it paid employees below market value. Please help plead our case with senior leadership.

I'm just learning about the benefits USC is taking away from us.

How can you be taking away the 15-year tuition benefit for people who have already received the letter? I know people who were purposely staying at USC at a lower salary than they could get elsewhere, in hopes of getting this benefit for their children. While that doesn't affect me particularly, it does affect so many

others. Someone in my department now wants to leave USC on principle. I imagine if this passes, we're going to lose a lot of good people. Shame on USC.

USC's Unifying Values are around integrity, excellence, DEI, well-being, open communication, and accountability. The Tuition Assistance Benefit changes seem to go against all of these values. Thousands of USC staff members, current and former employers, were and are completely shocked and dismayed by sprinklings of information that trickled in about significant changes to the Tuition Assistance Benefit. First, there was no clear communication with the people being directly impacted by these changes. Second, Staff Assembly had to push university leadership to share any information in October. Third, despite multiple groups requesting open communication and excellence, two of the unifying values touted by the university, we still have not been made aware of the reasons for these changes or brought into discussions about any possible alternatives for cost-saving measures that we can take across the university, including by highly compensated individuals, expensive campus access factors, and exorbitant parking and facilities expenses. Now months later, staff and faculty members are still feeling the ill effects of these disappointing actions of getting the rug pulled out from under many families by the very institution we have supported over many decades. The TAB changes do not seem to be worth the loss of goodwill that has resulted from these unclear cost savings. Why not continue the benefits for those employees who were counting on them as they had been when they were hired, but revise them for new hires? Please reinstate the benefit and provide a guarantee to not take them away again, otherwise I fear that trust and morale might never be regained.

Think of the people. These changes drastically impact some of the most loyal, dedicated, hardworking Trojans, those who have stood by the university through some of the most challenging times in our lifetime. The TAB changes most hurt our families, those who have been some of the most vocal advocates of USC in our local communities, despite continued increases in tuition, parking, and other fees that are making USC less desirable to employees and prospective students. Over nearly 30 years of working at USC, I have forgone opportunities to accept

higher paying jobs. We have grown our family, our financial situation, and our living situation around USC because of TAB. Now, with a teenager and pre-teen who have been working hard to fulfill aspirations to attend USC for their undergraduate and graduate degrees, their hopes have been squashed, and our family's plans have completely changed by the stolen prospect of attending an institution they have loved since birth. It has been heartbreaking to hear numerous families with similar stories and even worse to know many of them.

University leadership needs to address the topic directly with staff and faculty. Right now, the message is that we are all replaceable and they really don't care about us. If they feel like this was the best decision they could make, they should show up in front of everyone to explain how they can stand behind this decision and why other options were not better. They should feel confident enough to provide details around the rationale and maybe even let us help the university find a better path.

Addendum #2

The following is a list questions and comments submitted via the Zoom Q&A feature during the October 25, 2024 meeting. Staff Assembly has reviewed 109 submitted questions, and compiled 38 tuition-benefits-related submissions.

These comments appear as originally submitted, with the only edits being the redaction of personally identifiable information, and a small number of spelling corrections for the purpose of clarity.

What does “effective Summer 2025” mean? Admissions applications are due November 1, 2024. Will the new TAB changes affect those who 1) already submitted their admissions application or 2) are accepted (starting in late January 2025) for the Fall 2025 class? Or will these students be considered “currently enrolled dependents with a 15-year letter—regardless of employment status” and “eligible for current benefits through the completion of their program” since the new policy was not enacted at the time the admissions and acceptance process was completed for the incoming 2025 class? While not enrolled, it does not seem ethical to withhold the benefit once the process is started and the dependent is admitted—and most people (especially those not employed at USC) with a 15-year letter don’t know the benefit change is imminent.

Please explain about Progressive degree for a dependent(children)that is admitted in 2025 as a freshman and intend to do a PDP degree?

As someone who was hired in 2008, I’ve already hit 15 years, but I think I never got a “15 year letter” and have no idea what that’s referring to. Even though I’m still employed here, do these changes mean I won’t get one at all?

Thank you Staff Assembly for helping disseminate this information. I would think all this information should be first be announced by university leadership. Are there any plans to hear from university leadership directly? I would think there would be a message to all university members from President Folt, heads of HR or other leadership. Thank you,

When will the University confirm the TAB changes are in fact happening?

Is there any negotiation room with Administration to reverse the decision to remove the 15 year legacy TAB benefit or is this a done deal?

We are 30min into the meeting. Are you going to have enough time to discuss TAB?

How can USC take an accrued TAB benefit (for employees who joined before 2011 and have 15 years letter) away retroactively. When I was hired in 2003, I was told explicitly that this is a great benefit and accounts for lower salary you accrue working in academia compared to industry. And it did factor in my decision to not move to the industry all these years. I accrued this benefit in 2018. Now after 23 years of working at USC , I am being told we are going to take this benefit away. I have young kids 6 and 2 years old, and am extremely concerned by this abrupt change of policy.

Has the board of trustees been made aware of these issues and how strongly staff and faculty are opposed to these changes?

We need answers around Tuition Benefit Assistance!

I'm feeling like the benefits team is just reading from the slides. It sounds like the issues people have with benefits haven't been covered or addressed. If participants are okay with it, can they please address what has been shared in the chat? They haven't discussed TAB or any benefits that have been cut...

Staff members who were arrived before July 1, 2011 have been here for 13.5 years or more. How will those that hit 15 years within the next year be handled?

With all due respect, I appreciate Staff Assembly folks answering as many of our questions as you can, but shouldn't HR be answering them? After last week they should've come more prepared with extra reinforcements so staff assembly wouldn't be expected to answer these questions that are very much not what you are being paid for.

Please discuss TAB changes and allow staff advocates to discuss what actions we can take.

There are questions here that havent been addressed

Can Greg address what is causing the dire financial situation we are in? Along with these cuts to TAB, departments have been asked to reduce their budgets or prevented from backfilling headcount. What is the impetus for all these cost cutting measures?

Is there any negotiation room with Administration to reverse the decision to remove the 15 year legacy TAB benefit or is this a done deal?

The current info on dependents access to Grad tuition looks incorrect. The published policy says 100% of 1 degree.

So, if your child is already enrolled as UG now, but they are not in PDP yet, they will not be able to start their PDP program?

I see graduate certificates will no longer be covered. How about graduate degrees? And will current faculty/staff enrolled continue to be eligible?

If I am currently enrolled in a degree program and my expected grad date will be Spring 2026, will I not have my last year covered by TAB??

Who can I contact in regards of TAB?

My case is that my daughter did not qualify for progressive degree this year because she's a 2023 spring admit, not currently enrolled in TAB because I decided to take advantage of the university scholarship she has so my plan was to use my benefit for her graduate degree. Now, I am screwed! Who would be able to assist me in a manner that I can take advantage to TAB and my daughter can be eligible for progressive degree?

I may have missed this -- if a dependent is accepted and enrolls in a progressive degree in fall 2025, is that covered by TAB? what happens when their class level changes to graduate status?

Please provide stats from HR on how many employees have reached this milestone, at the next session or in future communication.

There was already a phase out from 2011. Why kill it 13 years later? Please ask the "powers that be".

how will former employees be informed about the policy change?

I have been employed at USC for almost 25 years. I did receive a 15 Year letter several years ago. How do I request a copy of that letter that I received several years ago?

I currently have a child away at a different school under TE, and I'm a 20 yr employee, if I leave SC will the TE be honored for her remaining 3 yrs of undergrad?

I just emailed for my 15 year letter today. Will I even get a letter? I mostly want it in case I need it for participation in a lawsuit at this point.

Addendum #3

The following is a list questions and comments submitted via the Zoom chat during the October 18th, 2024 and October 25th, 2024 meetings. Staff Assembly has reviewed over 6,620 lines of chat and compiled this list to reflect 224 tuition-benefits-related comments submitted by meeting attendees.

These comments appear as originally submitted via chat, with the only edits being the redaction of personally identifiable information, a small number of spelling corrections, and one [edit] for the purpose of clarity on the date of a specific university communication.

- Can STAFF members still get benefits funding for graduate degrees?
- The new TAB policy seems to discriminate against parents who had kids late in life. We can't retire until our kids finish college.
- Will there be a separate meeting like this for faculty? We have to find out about the staff meetings from staff and sneak in to learn this stuff (please don't kick me out!)
- Is there a plan for leadership (or the individuals responsible for making these benefit changes) to meet with staff? If the university truly values transparency and staff wellness, then they should make steps to show accountability for the decisions they have made that a majority of staff disagree with.
- Shame on USC!!! People have devoted their entire life to be "Grandfathered" in to receive a better opportunity and better education for are kids all to be stripped away. As they continue to build a brand new baseball and football facility right behind the landscape TRAILER. Not a building a trailer.
- How much money has been spent on security measures around USC since spring 2024? Has this played a role in any of this decision making?
- Folks in our office want to see the new TAB info/slide
- When is leadership meeting with staff and faculty to answer questions?

- Why is staff paying for the budget shortfall
- Life decisions were made based on the tuition benefit and were promised to those who were grandfathered why is it being stripped away
- Can you please address the free tuition for our children I'm pretty sure that's why we are all here!!!!
- Literally why we all took this job.
- Yes, Let's discuss TAB. This is staff assembly. STAFF: what are our options for collective action?
- I understand some changes but to have them be taken away so quickly rather than to announce them at least 3 to 4 years advance so families have time to pivot
- We are 45min into the meeting. It doesn't look like the presenters are going to discuss Tuition Benefits issue. Please show the TAB slide again
- Look, the \$400 we are losing in the fitness incentive and health assessment is not what most people are here about. We are concerned about the \$100,000 we had planned in benefits for our children's graduate degrees.
- What happened to our culture change when this feels so punitive
- So to confirm, those of us who have been here 20+ years will have to continue working at USC when/if our kids get admitted to USC?
- I'd like to take the culture survey again now.
- Does the TAB affect the tuition exchange with other schools?
- It would be helpful to have those who need the 15-year letter to know that it should be requested through the Benefits office, not your department or school HR partner
- The tuition benefit is what draws and attracts staff
- Benefit changes? We're really not gonna call it what it is? Benefit cuts?
- 100% was relying on the GRADUATE benefit for my kids!
- President's Office needs to host a meeting, not Staff Assembly.
- The TAB costs are not real costs to the University. They are accounting costs and do not take into account the less measurable benefits to the University.
- Does the university have any interest in one of their alleged "core values" which includes transparency? Where is the email to all staff detailing these changes as not all staff have the privilege to attend these meetings.

- I agree with this completely. The level of data shared doesn't address our concerns, or explain why we (staff) are bearing the burden of what appears to be flagrant financial mismanagement.
- I think the larger question is retroactively taking away the 15 year benefit for people who were hired on promises of this benefit. now we are being told TAB will be honored only if we are still employed by USC at that time.
- Most of the increase in TAB expense over the past 10 years is due to the increase in tuition costs, not necessarily more people receiving TAB.
- Why are we continually trying to be in line with peers and can't make our own decisions for our own staff?
- I have been employed at USC for over 20 years. My kids are only 10, 7 and 7 months. You want us to believe that USC will make right on a TAB promise in 13 to 22 years when my kids actually become of college age, yet USC is not following through on their promises now? How could we possibly trust that to be true? I hope USC has done a reputational risk assessment of making these TAB benefits changes. USC leadership has struck a nerve and a tipping point and I hope you recognize that!!
- I added a question in the Q&A - I'll repeat it here: Is there any negotiation room with Administration to reverse the decision to remove the 15 year legacy TAB benefit or is this a done deal?
- I put this in the Q&A but want to put it here too: As someone who was hired in 2008, I've already hit 15 years, but I think I never got a "15 year letter" and have no idea what that's referring to. Even though I'm still employed here, do these changes mean I won't get one at all?
- TAB "accounts for lower salary" 🌀
- I'm ONE YEAR away from 15 years and have dedicated MY CAREER to USC BECAUSE OF TUITION EXCHANGE for GRAD SCHOOL for my kids. This is so unfair.
- Life altering decisions were made based on this benefit
- The questions are consistently being asked because no one is answering the question directly.
- Is there data to show the number of employee's children that have been admitted into USC that match this chart you are providing. Example this

chart is from 2017-2024, can we get a breakdown for each year that show the cost, and how many were admitted each year.

- Our current tuition benefits states one degree
- How does this affect the Tuition Exchange program?
- It may align, but it breaks the deal I was given when hired.
- As someone who started having kids at an older age and almost at my 15 years with USC (in March), it seems unfair that something I was promised when I was hired being taken away is a punch in the gut. If I want my daughter to take advantage of the tuition benefit, I would need to still be working at USC until I am 60 years old.
- Please clarify - is tuition covered for graduate/doctoral programs for the employees?
- Since peer research is continually being cited: Has peer research been done to determine outcomes of rescinding a grandfathered benefit like this? What were the outcomes of that research??
- \$5.3 million is nothing when you are agitating so much of your employee base. You spend 4x on the head football coach annually.
- The "run rate savings" are so meager. This is pathetic
- just very sad...i was really looking forward to the 15-year letter in just 6 months. =(
- In the "Run Rate Savings" I have a strong feeling that 1) life-time value of having dedicated, loyal employees' dependents become USC alumni was not in the math. We are in the business of education and "paying it forward" should be part of our DNA. 2) These individuals will now go somewhere else (not USC), so it will be a wash. Zero revenue before. Zero revenue now.
- But even if you are still working here, your kids can NOT use it for grad school? PLEASE ANSWER
- If the TAB 15 year benefit will be removed in the future, is there an official date that will take effect? If yes, when will that date be?
- Do employees get a tuition benefit for themselves? Say an employee would like to earn a certificate or graduate degree. It looks like certificates are no longer covered. What about the graduate degree?

- Does the new change affect the TUITION EXCHANGE option for existing USC employee's children?
- Just curious, so technically, someone can leave the university (no longer needing to have a consistent work period), then come back and restart when the child comes of age, then they will get the TAB benefit? I guess the benefit was a great incentive to keep staff's "loyalty".
- Can we do some sort of climate survey? We need to show measurably how much this has impacted us. Especially able to do it anonymously since some of us have leadership/management that may not be as understanding/flexible about us sharing our honest feedback.
- Incredibly disappointing. A family member stayed here for over 15+ years and has two teens and a pre-teen he was planning for with this benefit.
- are there any changes to the tuition exchange benefit for undergrad degrees for the children of current staff employees
- More stats please. How many staff have stayed since 2011 and how many eligible?
- Will the undergraduate degree benefit still cover progressive degrees?
- do you think TAB will be reconsidered in future?
- Stop punishing our children! We have put up with so much to get our letters!
- USC is letting down so many people who have served the university as dedicated employees for so long, and doing it for a nominal cost savings. This is shameful.
- Is voiding the 15-year letter for non-employees a ploy to get higher paid people to leave so they can replace them with entry-level folks?
- When did they stop or will they stop issuing letters?
- There was already a phase out from 2011. Why kill it 13 years later? Please ask the "powers that be".
- Could we please communicate this information to those with more than 15 years of service who are no longer working at USC?
- Past employees who attained 15 years have not been notified either.
- Is anyone else worried about our remaining benefits being taken away? How long do we think our retirement matching will last until it's lowered to match our "peers"?

- incredible that USC is willing to burn it down for \$3M
- Could we the comparisons between USC and peer institutions? Whether its for TAB or winter recess or other benefits?
- Agreed with this!! Huge inclusion issue
- First Generation college grads who work for USC are disproportionately affected. We aren't set up like faculty. Many of us don't own houses. My kids are being punished for me working at USC where I had almost zero work like balance. My kids are already making sacrifices for USC and now USC kicks them down.
- our hard working lower-income staff will suffer the most
- This greatly impacts upward mobility for staff.
- Wild to me that we're using peer institution info to DECREASE our benefits
- There's a reason we chose to work at USC and not at peer institutions.
- cancelling graduate certificates saves USC \$350k. Football coach makes \$20M
- Our lower-income staff who have worked at the university for over 15 years to provide tuition benefit opportunities for their children will suffer the most with these changes. How is this upholding our unifying values?
- HOW DO WE KNOW IT WON'T CHANGE DOWN THE ROAD SINCE IT'S CHANGING FROM WHAT WE HAVE ALL UNDERSTOOD FOR DECADES
- The rate savings is not much to cover the budget crisis so why punish the staff
- I'm in the same boat as you. 19 years here with young children.
- Clearly they never considered the social impact of this decision. I will never again tell anyone that USC is a great place to attend/work.
- Has the tuition exchange benefit been addressed? Are dependents still eligible for that benefit?
- Have peer institutions rescinded benefits in this manner?
- The UC system is not a peer - public / private is not equivalent
- I graduated in May as a result of the TAB benefits and was proud to be a USC alumni finally. But the way they are treating their employees not only infuriates me as a staff member, but is embarrassing and troubling from the alumni perspective. This is disappointing treatment and isn't something to be proud of

- So for us that have been around 20+ years (and have young children now), will our jobs be guaranteed by the time they're enrolled?
- I regret having to express this, but I'm increasingly concerned about my future here at USC. With only two years of experience at the university, I understand that change is inevitable, but there needs to be more transparency in the process. It is frustrating to continuously be informed of issues after the fact. Clear and timely communication would be greatly appreciated.
- This is not about comparison to our peer institutions. It seems like USC is having significant financial issues, and this is a low-hanging fruit. This is brutal.
- USC has been a place of excellence, a university that forges its own path rather than following in the footsteps of others. Given our proud history of setting high standards, it's disheartening to see the recent decision to eliminate the 15 year program. While the explanation given was to align our policies with peer institutions, it raises questions about why we're selectively benchmarking. Are we also examining pension plans and employee benefits at UC or Cal State schools, or are we only choosing certain aspects to emulate?
- As a business professional, I understand profit and loss, and I recognize the need for strategic decisions to ensure sustainability. We need to understand the full scope of the university's financial strategy/problems. With recent layoffs and hiring freezes, we need transparency on why these significant cuts are necessary now, and what budgetary targets we are striving to achieve. Beyond employee benefits, what other cost-saving measures are being explored to secure our university's financial future without compromising the well-being of our dedicated staff.
- I have been employed at USC for almost 25 years. I did receive a 15 Year letter several years ago. How do I request a copy of that letter?
- I currently have a child away at a different school under TE, and I'm a 20 yr employee, if I leave SC will the TE be honored for her remaining 3 yrs of undergrad?
- We thought we vested in this 15 yr benefit, our "pension" just got spent to pay some old bills.

- I just emailed for my 15 year letter today. Will I even get a letter? I mostly want it in case I need it for participation in a lawsuit at this point.
- what if you leave USC and come back, does the time length worked at USC resume, or do you start over?
- Can the University consider giving employee children an automatic acceptance to the undergrad program?
- At today's tuition rates, the 15-year letter is worth \$280k in benefit compensation. What is being done to compensate staff for the loss of this well-earned benefit?
- Based on reading the language on my 15-year letter, issued in 2012, I do not think that it states that the benefit granted in the letter can be rescinded. The benefit that the 15-year letter gives employees who were hired before 7/1/2011 and had reached the milestone is that they have same TAB benefits that current employees receive, regardless of employment status. The letter states that the TAB benefits can be changed at any time, but it doesn't not state that the letter granting employees with the 15-year letter the same status as current employees can be changed.
- Did the Trustees already approve this?
- Where can we get the slides for winter recess and TAB?
- Why am I bothering to commute 1.5-2hrs (ONE-WAY) when I can work nearby my house with these same type of benefits? I've stayed with USC BECAUSE of their benefits!
- Has the Benefits Office already been directed to no longer provide the letters? I just asked for mine (really just for the record) and I want to know if I'll get it.
- I currently have a child away at a different school under TE, and I'm a 20 yr employee, if I leave SC will the TE be honored for her remaining 3 yrs of undergrad?
- Even if u get the letter it's worthless.
- Of course the idea that physical possession of a letter that the employee had to know that they had to request is necessary for USC to honor its commitment is absurd.

- I assume this is a given, but I hope the HR Service center will clearly report to administration about the number of the comments and questions they're receiving and the nature of these concerns.
- Even if the plan is to make the 15 letter null and void I think they should still be given if requested.
- my question is if I've been employed for over 2 years and I'm still currently employed, is my child still eligible for the tuition assistance program?
- \$11,000,000 is so little to save to have this reputational drop.
- 14 years, 7th grader and 4th grader
- 16 years and a high school freshman, 7th and 3rd grader 🙄
- 17 yrs here with an 8th grader.
- 17years and a 7th & 5th grader
- 18 years with a 6th and 3rd grader
- 18 years with a 6th and 8th grader. I'm over 50yo. Looks like retirement isn't going to be a choice for me
- 20 years with a 4th grader
- 22 years with a 3rd grader.
- There is an error on that slide. The current policy for dependents on the TAB website, says 1 degree (UG or GRAD) but this slide says only 50% for Grad.
- BETRAYED is a better word for it. To save \$3.5M ?! This is a drop in the bucket to the amount of money spent on construction projects for certain prioritized departments.
- But only for undergraduate degrees. So many dependents use this for master's degrees.
- Even if they bring it back, I'm sure they'll accept fewer kids of employees or TAB kids
- Did they eliminate the option for graduate degrees for dependents?
- Hopefully you are healthy enough to work at usc for another 30 years!!! The "Grandfather" benefit is gone!!!! You have to currently be working at have for your kids to attend this university.
- I agree. Benefits are what incentivized employment at USC because salary is not competitive. Benefit cuts reduce ability to attract and retain excellent employees

- I'm 1 year away from 15 years. My kids are 3 and 6, so I'd have to say for 18 more years. Not cool.
- It's one thing to sign a contract that doesn't allow for tuition assistance, but it's another to take it away after it's in the contract.
- Me too. 26 years here with a 6th grader
- No graduate degrees for dependents ever again.
- No they said graduate degrees are no longer offered to dependents.
- no, children will no longer be eligible for a graduate degree
- Now, you can't leave if you hope to use the TAB. I planned on this for the last decade. Where was USC's financial plan?
- Our loyalty is clearly not valued, the benefits get cut and our raises are low/stagnating... what is the incentive to stay at USC?
- Same... 14, almost 15 years here and my daughter isn't even born yet.
- Seriously. I will never actually use this benefit personally but the change absolutely massacres morale for us all
- Slap in the face
- Spousal tuition benefits have decreased from 50% to 25%.
- Staff can no longer get graduate certificates for themselves.
- The argument about what others are doing is totally not compelling to me. We are positioning ourselves as leaders not followers.
- The buck keeps getting passed to staff 😞
- The footnote indicates this savings won't even be reached until FY30... what is the point of doing this?
- They said they would inform folks who are gone but....
- To confirm, however, children of staff will no longer be able to attend USC as a graduate student as part of TAB?
- What a shame and how disheartening for the people who have been grandfathered in pertaining to the 15 year rule. Basically we have all been lied to.
- Yep, 16 years and a 6yo and 1.5yo 😞
- Yep, that is why I'm upset here. I have a 19 year old in college elsewhere.
- Yes - this is a unique benefit that only a place like USC can give, and it benefits the org itself as employees improve their skills!

- Yes, I learned they did last week. Frustrating for me as this was the plan for my daughter who is currently in college.
- You should ask benefits office for your letter ASAP, although if this new TAB benefits is true, all letters are void
- @Greg Condell "Leadership" needs to be held accountable. We need to be able to communicate with the directly.
- A graduate certificate is different than a graduate degree, correct?
- A little confused on how the slide was written regarding the TAB changes for UG degree dependent benefits. Are there limits to the number of dependents that can use the UG degree benefit?
- Again, I'll ask, how many people who began before July 1 and expected this benefit will be impacted?
- All of this budget info and cost-cutting as it relates to employee benefits and culture should be communicated in writing, from the President/Provosts.
- Are graduate certificates equivalent to graduate degrees?
- Are there any grandfathered 15 year letters?
- Can we get the FAQ?
- Can you please confirm that no 15 yr letters will be honored or no more will be given?
- Communication is one of our unifying values, yet we seem to need to have to constantly request communication from our leadership? *sigh
- Current USC students on TAB should still be eligible for progressive degree.
- Do I need to be employed if I am grandfathered in and my child is using TE?
- Do you have to physically have a paper 15 year letter for USC to honor it's commitment?
- Does the letter say "can be rescinded at a future date"? - if not, I sure hope that all those with the letter don't come after USC with a Breach of Contract claim.
- Fitness incentive - gone, Health costs - up 5-7%, TAB - gone. Winter recess - reduced. And no real explanation besides to save \$?
- Folks who began prior to July 2011 should be able to earn their letters. Period.

- Frankly, the 15 year discontinuation is a gut-punch. Especially having given so much time to USC.
- FWIW, many people might not realize the tax situation for TAB for dependents if we left USC before this policy change. That enough was reason for me to stay.
- Grad age cap going to 26 is NOT how life works. Grad students do not always jump right in after an UG degree. And the projected savings is a joke.
- How many people are going to be impacted by ending the grandfathered letter?
- How this is being communicated is simply disappointing. So much for a unifying value.
- I agree that more information on TAB is important.
- I guess I'm just part of the 15%?
- I think everyone wants to know WHY
- I think the questions in the chat should convey that the email that went out on 10/4 [open enrollment] the language was not clear regarding changes. Also I hope a formal announcement states clearly the winter recess and TAB changes that we are discussing.
- I was told they didn't give letters anymore. That it is just entered on your profile. I have been here 29 years.
- I'm so heartbroken. I've only been at USC for 2 years, and it's still early in my career, but I could see myself staying at USC for a long time before this meeting. Now that everything is being gutted, promises to long-serving staff are being broken, there is little incentive for loyalty and my confidence in USC is wavering.
- If there were more budget transparency, that would be helpful. While we are in a budget deficit, how much is being spent on "security" every month? How are we paying for this in terms of reducing spending on employee benefits?
- If this administration is willing to make these decisions about our lives without our input, what can staff do to get an actual seat in the room?
- I'm confused. Staff can still obtain Graduate degrees correct
- Is it considered one or two degrees?

- Is there a compromise possible for the 15 year letter that would keep it for current employees, but not offer it to future hires?
- It definitely feels like staff are being disproportionately affected by all these benefit cuts and increases. Where is the transparency to show which cuts are being made at the top to share in these benefit cuts?
- It seems to be a consistent trend at this university to reduce staff benefits every year while not increasing our wages. For a university that claims to value staff and our wellness, this clearly demonstrates otherwise. Very disappointing.
- It's no accident this info is being rolled out so late and in this manner...
- It's supposed to be "Trojan Family" - that should be better than a democracy, because we should all be looking out for each other.
- My daughter is a spring admit, therefore she did not qualify for the progressive degree this summer and has to wait to next year. Does it mean that she will not qualify for that?
- My daughter is on TE at an out of state school. Any change for her?
- No reason to stay 15+ years or work towards that
- Not honoring current 15 year letters is contrary to our unifying values of open communication. What's the point of a commitment if you aren't going to honor it
- Not including this slide in the deck is a perfect example of lack of transparency. It's like they don't want staff to notice.
- Oh no, No more graduate Certificates? This was a HUGE factor for me.
- Once again a formal announcement and sessions need to be addressed for these benefit changes.
- Oof - People want to work here just for TAB. People will leave SC if these benefits negatively affect their plans.
- People's lives are impacted and Carol Folt and Felicia Washington don't even have the courage to face us.
- Since DEI is a core value of the institution, I will note that there will inevitably be a unequal effect of the tuition assistance change. Children of deans, provosts, full professors are more likely to be admissible to the undergraduate programs; lower level staff are less likely to have children

admitted as undergraduates but can likely get admitted to master's programs. This is very, very out of step with our shared DEI values.

- So one child has the benefit but not others who haven't started?
- So USC will no longer provide tuition assistance for dependent's graduate program?
- Some of this information should have been shared months ago, why wait til now?
- The letter states the university can terminate or change the TAB benefit without notice
- The time for that feedback was before the decision was made....but we will see where this goes
- This policy should not be changed until all eligible staff remaining from before July 1 receive their letter. This is outrageous.
- USC should honor the TAB benefit and give the letters to those grandfathered in/ hired before 2011 until they meet their 15 years of service.
- Was the TAB decision made because of the legacy admissions decision?
- What is your plan for employees who worked here for 15 years and have separated?
- When does the 15 year letter end? As of when?
- When will a written formal announcement be made regarding the changes in the extended Winter Recess and TAB.
- When will the non-health related pieces announced today be shared in writing with the entire university staff?
- When will winter recess and TAB changes be shared in writing to all staff?
- WHERE CAN STAFF FIND THIS INFO?
- Where do we go with questions about this?
- Why don't staff get a vote? All these discussions take place but we don't get a vote as to what affects us directly.
- Will all our questions/concerns be addressed to leadership after this meeting?
- Will the 2 year waiting period remain for new staff for TAB?
- Yes the 15 year letter was a selling point when many of us were hired.
- That's so heartbreaking for families with multiple children.

- I agree. The above-par benefits (tuition, health, wellness, etc.) off-set the low salary. The incentive to stay here wanes as benefits decrease.
- No, the TAB benefit used to be available to dependents up to age 35, that age limit is now being reduced to 26
- I began in August 2010 and hit 15 yrs in August. How many folks are in that same position about to earn the letter and then this decision?
- that actually happened in 2011, anyone hired after that time would not receive a letter. This is now a complete end to the program
- which is why folks who have been here since 2011 and are just about to hit 15 years should still be grandfathered
- You have to be working at USC to get the TAB benefit, so the letter doesn't matter anymore.
- Thanks. Its the grad certificates that are no longer TAB
- Mine too! I am confused on how this will affect us. :(
- This is correct, no new letters and current letters are now void