



Oral History Association

Middle Tennessee State University
MTSU Box 193
1301 East Main Street
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Kevin Washburn
Dean, University of Iowa Law School
130 Byington Rd.
Iowa City, IA. 52242

Bruce Harreld
President, University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA. 52242

December 5, 2018

Dear Dean Washburn and President Harreld:

The Oral History Association (OHA), represented here by its co-executive directors, urge you to stop your efforts to close the University of Iowa Labor Center.

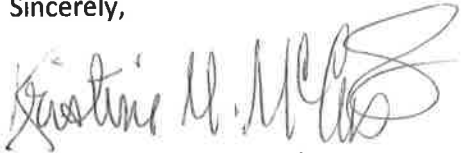
Established in 1951, the UI Labor Center is the only Iowa state unit devoted to research and education on labor and workplace issues, including innovative historical research and teaching that is widely respected in our field. Every year, the center teaches non-credit classes to over 2,000 continuing education students; provides instruction to undergraduate general education courses in labor history and labor studies; coordinates student research, experiential learning, internships and career placement; and conducts interdisciplinary research on a wide range of labor and workplace issues.

The OHA is especially concerned about the IU Labor Center's stellar commitment to oral history as it has documented Iowa's history via its extensive oral history collection. The center directs the illustrious Iowa Labor History Oral Project (ILHOP), an almost fifty-year-old oral history collaboration between the university, the State Historical Society of Iowa, and the Iowa labor movement. ILHOP has contributed to hundreds of dissertations, articles, and books in labor and working-class history, including several path-breaking studies of workers in the twentieth-century Midwest. Since 2015, ILHOP has collected hundreds of new interviews focused on the years since 1970, providing basic documentation for critically important and little understood areas of historical inquiry. Indeed, just as the Labor Center's closure was announced, ILHOP staff had begun work on a major project funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to increase online access to its newly digitized collection of over 1,200 interviews. But perhaps ILHOP's most unique aspect and greatest strength is its connection to the communities where interviewees live and work—a connection made possible only through the broad-based work of the center as a whole, and its ongoing educational outreach.

The center not only serves but epitomizes the three pillars of the university's core teaching, research, and outreach missions. Claims to the contrary fly in the face of the university's own strategic plan, which emphasizes student success, research, and engagement. We are also acutely aware that the proposed closure comes on the heels of attacks on workers' rights in Iowa and politically motivated assaults on labor education across the US. In this light, we are particularly concerned that the planned closure allows the UI College of Law to repurpose funds historically allocated to the center.

We call on you to reverse the decision to close the Labor Center, rescind the furlough notices given to Labor Center employees, and recommit the Labor Center's existing university funding to Labor Center activities.

Sincerely,



Kristine M. McCusker, Ph.D.
Co-Executive Director



Louis Kyrikoudes, Ph.D.
Co-Executive Director