STAFF COUNCIL

UNM Staff Council Resolution # 5
Authors: Joseph M. Lane, Quinton Valencia, and Winton Wood.
Title: Compensation Adjustment to Address Rising Living Costs and Basic Needs Insecurity.
Adopted by Staff Council on September 3rd, 2026

Whereas

1. **Whereas**, the New Mexico Legislature and the University of New Mexico provided a **1% compensation increase** for faculty and staff for Fiscal Year 2027, while employee health insurance premiums increased by **13.1%**, resulting in reduced take-home pay for many employees;
2. **Whereas**, the monthly, family UNM Employee Health Plan cost $930.70 in 2023-2024 and rose to $1,335.51 by 2026-2027; **a 43.5% cost increase across all plans in 3 years**; [4, 5]
3. **Whereas**, according to the **MIT Living Wage Calculator**, a household consisting of one working adult supporting two children in the Albuquerque metropolitan area requires an annual income of approximately **$77,792** to earn a living wage, while the annual salary midpoints for many UNM staff salary grades, Grades 5 through 13, range from approximately **$40,144 to $72,113**, placing a majority of employees below the estimated living wage; [1]
4. **Whereas**, many UNM employees in salary Grades 5 through 13 have estimated monthly take-home pay ranging from approximately **$2,700 to $3,400**, making it increasingly difficult to meet the costs of basic necessities while supporting themselves and their families;
5. **Whereas**, increases in housing, food, transportation, healthcare, childcare, and other essential living expenses over the past several years have significantly outpaced recent compensation increases, reducing the purchasing power of UNM employees;
6. **Whereas**, the **2023–2025 New Mexico Higher Education Basic Needs Study** found that among higher education full-time staff, 41% experienced food insecurity, 51% experienced housing insecurity, 11% experienced homelessness, 45% delayed or could not afford needed healthcare despite having health insurance, and approximately one-third reported experiencing anxiety and/or depression, demonstrating that many employees struggle to meet their basic needs; [2]
7. **Whereas**, competitive compensation and affordable healthcare benefits are essential to the University of New Mexico's ability to recruit, retain, and support the talented faculty and staff necessary to safeguard and fulfill the University's reputation and mission of education, research, patient care, and public service;

8. **Whereas,** New Mexico’s historic oil and gas boom, driven largely by extraordinary production in the Permian Basin, has transformed the State’s nonrenewable natural-resource wealth into approximately **$75 billion in sovereign wealth and permanent funds**, with those assets projected to approach **$100 billion by the end of the decade**, presenting New Mexico with a once-in-a-generation opportunity—and a profound responsibility—to convert today’s resource wealth into sustainable investments that strengthen our communities, expand educational and economic opportunity, and improve the quality of life for New Mexicans for generations to come;

Therefore, Be It Resolved

1. **Resolved**, that the University of New Mexico and the New Mexico Legislature support a health insurance premium cost-sharing model that minimizes the financial burden on employees and promotes affordable healthcare benefits for faculty and staff;
2. **Resolved**, that the University of New Mexico advocate for compensation increases sufficient to keep pace with the rising cost of living, inflation, and increases in employee healthcare premiums;
3. **Resolved**, that the University of New Mexico continue to prioritize compensation as a critical strategy for recruiting, retaining, and supporting a highly qualified workforce while addressing the documented basic-needs insecurity experienced by many faculty and staff;
4. **Resolved**, that, if the New Mexico Legislature approves a health insurance premium cost-sharing model under which employees contribute 20% of premium costs and the State of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico collectively contribute the remaining 80%, the University shall advocate for a minimum **4% recurring compensation increase for faculty and staff**, in recognition that employees earning **$54,999 or less already contribute approximately 20% of their health insurance premiums** and therefore may receive little or no financial benefit from the proposed cost-sharing model;
5. **Resolved,** that if the proposed 20% employee / 80% State–University health insurance premium cost-sharing model is **not** approved, the University advocate for a minimum **6–7% recurring compensation increase** for faculty and staff to help offset increases in employee healthcare insurance premiums and support employees' purchasing power.

Copies of this resolution shall be sent to the UNM Board of Regents; Dr. Steve Goldstein, President; Teresa Costantinidis, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration; Kevin Stevenson, Vice President for Human Resources; Dr. Barbara Rodríguez, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs; Dr. Mike Richards, Executive Vice President for HSC and CEO of the UNM Health System; Dr. Assata Zerai, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion; Faculty Senate President; Office of Government & Community Relations: Mike Puelle, Chief Government Relations Officer; Nathan Bush, Director, Government Relations; Lenaya Montoya, Associate Director, Government Relations; Kelley Maez**,** Government Relations Analyst; Roberta Lavin, Faculty Senate President; Liz Hutchison, Faculty Senate President-Elect; James Burns, Faculty Senate Government Relations Chair; and The Daily Lobo.

References

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *Living Wage Calculator: Albuquerque Metropolitan Area, New Mexico.*
2. University of New Mexico Basic Needs Project. *2023–2025 New Mexico Higher Education Basic Needs Study.*
3. David Uberti & Dan Frosch, "New Mexico Is Divided Over What to Do With $75 Billion in Oil Cash," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 2026.
4. Medical Rates for Active employees July 1st, 2023 – June 30th, 2024.
5. Medical Rates for Active employees July 1st, 2026 – June 30th, 2027.