

NEVADA FACULTY ALLIANCE

To: Assembly Government Affairs Committee

Meeting on March 4, 2025

From: Amy Pason, Nevada Faculty Alliance Government Affairs Committee

PUBLIC COMMENT: Support AB 191

I write this comment in my capacity as the chair of the Government Relations Committee for the state Nevada Faculty Alliance but also bring my experience of working in shared governance at the University of Nevada, Reno when I served as Faculty Senate Chair from 2020-22 as well as the Chair of the NSHE Council of Senate Chairs. I've had mostly productive and positive experiences with NSHE and institution leaders. During my time on the Senate, there was also a lot of leadership turnover and changes: I worked with two sets of UNR President/Provosts, three different NSHE Chancellors, and a number of changes to College, School, and administrative unit leadership (Vice Presidents and Vice Provosts). The **main lessons learned** from my time in the Senate include: ***1) who is in leadership determines how much faculty can have input in the policies impacting their work; 2) best intentions and best practices can be limited by what is recognized in law; and 3) most workplace conflicts can be attributed to not having clear policy (which also means they can be resolved through mutually agreed upon contracts).***

My whole career, I've been committed to ensuring higher education workers can thrive in their important educational and research work by having fair and inclusive organizational structures. In my own research and teaching, I focus on collaborative practices, and the importance of anyone who is impacted by decisions having a say in those decisions. Given my experience, I know that workplace rights are not guaranteed, therefore **I support AB 191** to give NSHE faculty the **right to collectively bargain** (if they so choose) to have more guarantees and a say in our work. The following experiences illustrate how collective bargaining could improve our education organizations.

Faculty Having a Say In Our Work.

When I was Senate Chair, it really was dependent on who the Board of Regents Chair was on how much Faculty Senate Chairs have speaking rights in meetings. Depending on leadership of a given department, division, or college, faculty inclusion in decision making processes could vastly differ. Faculty Senate's role is largely advisory, and I spent much of my time working with faculty committees who make recommendations for what they thought was needed to address the concern or workplace issue. In our advisory process, these recommendations were acknowledged by administration but then left to linger. Understandably, some of what was recommended was contingent on resources; other items dependent on solely whether administrators decided to act or not. Some of our recommendations were simply that key administrators meet with our Senate committees regularly to inform us on issues such as budgets and enrollment. And we also learned that practices where we thought we had more binding authority, could change depending on who is interpreting Bylaws at a given time.

I'll give a more specific example of where I saw the limits agreements made in bylaws, but that could be interpreted and practiced differently depending on who is in charge. Given the leadership turnover at UNR while I was Senate Chair, we have had numerous search committees formed, and I had to advocate strongly to ensure regular faculty (and not just Deans and Senior Leaders) were appointed to committees. I had to remind new campus leaders that there were processes for faculty inclusion in these committees and that Faculty Senate had a role in choosing faculty representation. Without this advocacy, policies faculty **do have** in bylaws might not be followed.

Particular to AB 191, as Chair of the NSHE Chairs Council, I worked with NFA to request an update to NSHE policy related to collective bargaining (not updated since 1990 and inconsistent with current practices and CBAs at our institutions). I followed what I was told were the unwritten practices for Faculty Senates to ask for policy updates; I was given numerous reasons why the updated policy had to wait (change of Chancellor, change of NSHE general council, that NFA could still go to the State Legislature, etc.). Working rights should not be contingent on whether leadership makes it a priority to update or work with faculty on the policies guiding our work. **Collective bargaining ensures that all are involved with and understand the rights and expectations of our working relationships.**

Best Intentions Are Limited.

My current commitment to shared governance at UNR is as the chair of the Graduate Council. This is an elected group of faculty that advise the Dean of the Graduate School and review policies that guide graduate education. Our concern is both for the success of our graduate programs as well as ensuring policies that support graduate student success as the success of our students is the success of our programs. We recognize that faculty members may excel in their own research and teaching but may not have the skills to be the best supervisor. To that end, the Graduate Council has developed a document that outlines best practices for supervisors of graduate student workers. However, our document can only live in “handbooks” and act as a guide for faculty—we **do not have authority to require** supervisors to follow what we suggest. **With a collective bargaining agreement, we can put in provisions that guarantee written agreements for work expectations**, how sick time can be taken, or that it is expected that when the university is closed, graduate students should not be expected to work on campus—and that faculty can hold each other accountable to these policies.

Clear Policies Prevent Conflict.

One memorable moment as Senate Chair was following a meeting with all Senior Leadership at UNR (Deans, Vice Provosts, and Vice Presidents and unit Directors). A newly hired Dean came up to me after the meeting wondering “**where is the faculty handbook?**” We had just been discussing a new policy (and related process in Workday), and she realized just how many different sets of policies and procedures different aspects of our work were guided by. In previous institutions she had worked in, there was **one** faculty handbook that included the policies guiding work or that provided the resource list of where faculty should go depending on the specific issue. On campuses without collective bargaining agreements, there is likely not **one faculty handbook**. I had to explain to this Dean, that depending on the issue, she might have to

consult the Board of Regents Policy Handbook, University Bylaws, whatever bylaws might exist for her college or individual departments in the college, the University Administrative Manual that contains other policies, the specific processes used for functions that go through our HR software, or the software used to evaluations or promotion, or for approving curriculum. If that wasn't enough, there might be other policies or processes that exist outside these approved spaces, and that individual groups might adopt for clarity on specific aspects of any of the above processes. This Dean wanted to do right by faculty by following university policies—frustrated that it was hard to find and know where those policies were.

Differently, I also worked with faculty who had conflicts with their supervisors on a variety of issues. Some had bylaws the supervisor was not following; others did not have any bylaws or agreed upon procedures that made clear expectations on how their work would be evaluated. Some supervisors took offense when I would point to bylaws they should follow or suggest they needed input from their faculty on new evaluation processes. Many conflicts that escalated to grievance hearings or lawsuits could have been prevented or deescalated by having clear, mutually agreed upon policies. **A collective bargaining agreement is a mutually agreed upon policy that provides clear, transparent expectations for work.** The less time and energy spent on navigating workplace conflict, the more we can focus on what really matters—our educational mission to our students and for Nevada.

Not all institutions need collective bargaining to ensure fair workplaces. At the moment, collective bargaining isn't fully an option for NSHE faculty as it is not a right recognized in statute. **Support AB 191 so faculty do have this right.**

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The [Nevada Faculty Alliance](#) is the independent statewide association of professional employees of the colleges and universities of the Nevada System of Higher Education. The NFA is affiliated with the [American Association of University Professors](#), which advocates for academic freedom, shared governance, and faculty rights, and the [American Federation of Teachers/AFL-CIO](#), representing over 300,000 higher education professionals nationwide. The NFA works to empower our members to be wholly engaged in our mission to help students succeed.