



STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION OF NORTH CAROLINA, INC.

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600 Moye Blvd.
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Dear Dr. Benson,

Last night, we left the Project Unify Town Hall for ECU and Brody School of Medicine employees with more questions than answers. We expected to hear why this merger was necessary, why our jobs had to be put in jeopardy for a so-called greater good, but your “why” was quickly overshadowed by ours: Why do we still not have answers?

You say you’re being transparent, but the truth is that you don’t have answers. We heard “we don’t know” a record number of times and we are sure some of those “we don’t knows” were replaced by the equally overused platitude: “go to the project unify website.” We came to the meeting eager to discuss our futures and instead heard an hour-and-a-half long plug for a website that is only meant to give the guise of transparency and effectively communicates nothing at all.

We deserve better than this. We are ECU, we are Greenville and we are dedicated state employees of North Carolina. We are proud, protective and loyal. Why are we not being shown loyalty and protection in return?

You outlined three outcomes this merger hopes to achieve, but the actions to date and the lack of substance to explain how you plan to achieve these superlative qualifiers suggest otherwise. You want to be the:

1. Best Care in Eastern North Carolina
2. Best Educational Experience for the Brody School of Medicine
3. Best Employment Experience for Employees

We take issue with your means and methods to get there.

The best care for eastern North Carolina is one with competition and options. Perhaps the most jaw-dropping remark of the night was when you provided the reason for the merger as an effort to **eliminate competition** by eliminating current competition between ECU and Vidant. There are sound reasons that anti-trust and monopoly laws exist, Dr. Benson, and it is because competition is fundamentally good for the market and the community it serves. When healthcare options *decrease*, costs for healthcare services *increase*.

In a county where the per capita income is approximately \$23,500 and 23.4% of the residents fall below the poverty line, it is both reckless and wrong to expect the community to shoulder the financial burden of increased medical costs in the name of what is financially beneficial for ECU and a billion-dollar corporation, Vidant. Your patients are concerned about whether they will be able to afford the health care they already receive; however, the patients which keep you operational are surprisingly absent from the conversation.

Like your vision for Eastern North Carolina, the **best educational experience** for BSOM seems counter-intuitive. You propose VECU, the merged clinical practices, as a solution *because* it is a private entity and will not be dependent upon state funding. Yet, in the same series of remarks you said that you see this as an opportunity to get more money from the state to fund residencies in the Medical School. It seems like ECU wants to have its cake and eat it too and when all is said and done there won’t be a crumb left over for state employees.



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The last reason you mentioned—appropriately last—was the **employment experience**. Over the last few months – last night being no exception—it has become clear that employees are an afterthought to the dollar signs this merger promises. When asked if employees have been surveyed to contribute to the process and express their opinions and concerns, we only heard the canned response of the night — “go to projectunify.org.” You marketed last night’s meeting as an event designed to put employees in front of the leadership and ask burning questions about their job security, retirement, benefits and wages. Instead what they received was a talking head robotically repeating, “we don’t know.” We don’t know isn’t an acceptable response when 1,200 state jobs are on the line.

You are willing to spend what we can only imagine is an extraordinary amount of money—taxpayers’ money in fact— to hire big national consulting firms to examine the “numbers” of our personnel, but unwilling to collaborate with the actual employees who do the work and will ultimately be affected.

We are not numbers, Dr. Benson, we are real employees and citizens with voices. We demand to be heard.

Rambling soundbites rattled off last night by the ill-prepared Associate Vice Chancellor of Health Sciences Human Resources, Lisa Hudson, don’t make us feel better. A website doesn’t make us feel better. A website can’t tell us our department will still be here after the merger. A website isn’t going to allay the fears of a 20-year employee who hasn’t reached retirement age that they will be able to successfully retire when they are ready. A website isn’t going to assure a young employee who went to work for the state expecting to build a career and a future that they will still be able to do that when they don’t have their five years in to be vested in our State retirement system. A website isn’t going to understand that many of your employees already live with the anxiety of being one paycheck away from financial hardship. Your website isn’t helping.

The only thing your website confirms is that the leadership is blindly disconnected from the workforce it is supposed to protect. We do not feel protected.

We are more than the bottom line. We are the state employees of North Carolina and we are not for sale.

Respectfully,

The State Employees Association of North Carolina