



Public Positions on State Legislative and Budgetary Issues Faculty and Staff Public Comment Advisory

The purpose of this advisory is to help faculty and staff deal with requests for public comment, whether oral or written, on legislative and budgetary matters. At the outset, it is important to emphasize that the University respects the right of employees to communicate with government officials and others on matters of public policy. This advisory is designed to clarify roles and responsibilities and contemplates two general situations: first, requests for public comments from faculty and staff in their individual capacities or as members of outside organizations; second, requests for public support from the University.

With respect to the first situation, there is a tendency for people who hear or receive comments from faculty and staff to believe that if a person identifies himself as an employee of Mason that he is speaking on behalf of or with the approval of the University. That is often not the case. In fact, the President must approve official University positions. Accordingly, when faculty or staff members testify as individuals or as representatives of an organization other than Mason, we request that they inform their “audiences” that their comments are not intended to represent the views of the university. A simple caveat at the beginning of written or oral comments that states, “I am not representing the views of George Mason University” will suffice. Following this procedure will insure that faculty and staff can feel free to offer testimony. It will alleviate any concerns that their statements will be wrongly construed to be official positions of the University.

Faculty and staff not testifying on behalf of Mason should refrain from using University stationery to express their views. Likewise, faculty and staff are encouraged to adhere to University policies relating to the use of equipment, including but not limited to email, facsimile, and telephones. In addition, if testimony is given during a faculty or staff member’s normal business hours, he should consider whether it is appropriate to utilize annual leave while away from the workplace.

With respect to the second situation, if faculty and staff believe it appropriate, they are encouraged to communicate in writing to their deans and/or department chairs any request for the University to publicly support a specific legislative or budgetary proposal. It would also be helpful to provide a recommendation with supporting reasons in any such communication. The dean or department head will determine if the matter should be referred to their vice president for further review and action. The vice president will, in turn, decide whether to forward the request on to the president for approval.

In the event a request for University public support is received with a response time of less than five business days, in addition to a department chair, dean or vice president, contact with the Office of the Vice President for Government & Community Relations would be appreciated.

If you have any questions regarding this advisory, please contact Mark Smith, Director of State Government Relations, at mesmith@gmu.edu or 804-786-2216.