April 26, 2010

Dear AFT Sisters and Brothers:

This is the first formal attempt to convince AFT unit members to make a commitment and sign the **PLEDGE** to attend the **CITIZENS' RALLY**, scheduled for **Saturday, May 22, at noon in front of the New Jersey State House** on West State Street in Trenton.

Now is the time to get your name near the top of the **PLEDGE LIST** and show your dedication to **SOLIDARITY** with others who will be protesting the unfair budget cuts proposed by Governor Christie and supported by a number of politicians of both parties. You will also sleep better at night once you do this. The **CITIZENS' RALLY** is being supported by a broad coalition of state groups including public employee union members and their families, students, veterans, civil rights advocates, retirees, concerned taxpayers and community activists. This is a broad coalition that has the power to bring about the desired changes. It is a "grassroots" movement supported by many organizations which have the structure and resources necessary to make the total effort effective. Check [HERE](#) to see the list growing daily.

The hope and expectation is that this will be the largest rally in the history of Trenton but, whether that happens or not is partially up to the AFT and our Local. Our union represents more than 8,000 faculty, librarian and professional staff employees at the nine public colleges. If we are going to carry our portion of the load in order to make this event the **HUGE SUCCESS** it needs to be, **WE NEED A BIG TURNOUT THAT DAY.** This means not only those of us who live in New Jersey have to take the time to come to Trenton for the rally, but the approximately 20% who do not live in New Jersey must also plan to show up.

President Gitenstein has a web page urging everyone to be an advocate for TCNJ. We would like to add to her "What can you do? list, **SHOW UP AT THE MAY 22 CITIZENS' RALLY in Trenton.**

Having your body in front of the State House that day will send a much stronger and more public message to politicians who are willing to cut essential benefits to residents of New Jersey and make us pay more for the remaining services, than writing letters or sending emails. Too many politicians make cuts than increase the surtax on residents making more than $400,000 per year or increase state revenues in other ways. Politicians of both parties are playing games with the so-called "Millionaire's Tax" while workers in NJ pay the higher costs for their follies. We **MUST** show them on May 22, that they will pay the price for their irresponsible actions when elections are next held. **We have the power to do that and we must resolve to see that it happens!**

In order to make it impossible for AFT unit members to resist the invitation to participate in the Citizens' Rally, we are considering having a social event after it concludes, which should be around 3 pm or so. Having something afterwards would give us a chance to relax and share the experiences of being a part of the rally. For many it will be the first time they have been involved in something of this type. For others of us, it will rekindle thoughts of previous similar events in which we participated. For both groups, doing this will be a warm-up for what will need to be done in the future as we carry this battle forward. **PLEASE, PLEASE plan to attend the rally.**

Not having a significant turnout from our Local will tell us how likely it is we will be able to stage any future protests and we will have to plan accordingly. If President Gitenstein had announced the likelihood that, in the face of the worsening budget crisis anticipated next year, it would be necessary to declare a fiscal exigency at TCNJ and layoff tenured faculty as well as other employees, have 12 or more furlough days, and across-the-board salary reductions, I feel it would be more likely that a good number of us would find the time to show up at the rally. But, make no mistake, everything isn't fine just because she hasn't announced those plans.

We can wait until the edicts have been issued to react or we can be proactive. History has shown which one of these strategies is more efficient. The **Citizens' Rally on May 22** is the first step in a train of events which can only be successful if many of us take the time and participate. Leaving it for someone else to do what needs to be done will not work.

Your response to a Qualtrics **RALLY SURVEY** will be valuable as we make decisions and plan for this rally. Please take a few minutes and provide your feedback. Your input will be appreciated.

This is your opportunity to be able to tell your grandchildren that you participated in the **LARGEST RALLY EVER HELD IN TRENTON**, the capitol of our great state, New Jersey. What a story you'll be able to share. Who knows, it might be what motivates them to go into a life of public service.

More information and invitations will be coming along on a regular basis.
In Solidarity, Ralph