Campaign Statement for Donna Murch

My name is Donna Murch, and I am asking for your vote to join the leadership of the AAUP Council from Region 4 as part of the candidate slate, Faculty United for the Common Good. AAUP has been central to the struggle for academic freedom, faculty and staff governance and greater job security for workers in higher education, and I would be honored to become a member of its executive committee. In both my lived experience and my scholarship, well-funded, affordable higher education has been a transformative social good with far reaching effects on people’s individual lives, movements for equity and our democracy itself. Equally important, is ensuring that higher education is a fair employer that pays its workers living wages, invests in the communities where its campuses reside and prioritizes its true mission of teaching, research and service.

My experience as the current president of the New Brunswick chapter of the Rutgers AAUP AFT, a long-standing member of our executive board, and as a co-chair of the BIPOC committee have taught me the importance of collective organizing efforts across job category and campus. In my first book, Living for the City, I explored how free tuition at community colleges and state universities in Cold War California nurtured a new generation of activists who became leaders in the long civil rights and black radical movement. It’s in this spirit that I created a union Freedom School during the CoVid-19 pandemic to support organizing work with the seventeen unions that compose the Coalition of Rutgers Unions. Working in such broad coalitions has truly renewed my hope in the future of higher education. These collective efforts that bridge academic workers with our sister unions in dining hall, medicine, custodial, clerical, engineering etc. is a constant source of motivation to work with others not only on my local campus, but as part of a national organizing effort.

For all of these reasons, I have proudly joined the slate Faculty United for the Common Good. We believe that AAUP and all higher ed workers must focus on a broad vision of wall-to-wall organizing. For us this means tearing down the barriers that divide us to build advocacy chapters, coalitions, and collective bargaining units across job categories: from professional staff and grad workers to dining staff, adjunct faculty, and tenure track faculty. It means confronting contingency at our institutions and demanding that all higher ed work be treated with dignity. It means aligning ourselves with students to cancel student debt, while winning free public higher education in two and four year institutions. It means recognizing that our campuses have no borders and we must organize for and with the communities to which we belong. It means recognizing and making reparations for the present-day and historic harms that academia has wrought on communities of color: labor exploitation, land displacement, and scientific experimentation. And this recognition demands that our institutions go beyond declarations and reports to undertake reparations in our broader communities. Another university is possible.

Donna Murch is associate professor of history at Rutgers University, where she is chapter president of the New Brunswick chapter of Rutgers AAUP AFT, co-chair of the union’s BIPOC committee and a charter member of Scholars for a New Deal for Higher Education. Her publications include, Assata Taught Me: State Violence, Racial Capitalism, and the Movement for Black Lives, Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California and the forthcoming title, Crack in Los Angeles: Policing the Crisis and the War on Drugs. She has written for the Sunday Washington Post, Guardian, New
Republic, Nation, and Boston Review and appeared on BBC, CNN, Democracy Now and in Stanley Nelson’s documentary, Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution and Sam Pollard’s MLK/FBI.