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## Cambridge City Council votes to back effort to unionize adjunct faculty at local campuses

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 14, 2014 01:00 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

The Cambridge City Council passed a resolution Monday night giving its formal support for a recent movement by adjunct faculty to unionize in an effort to improve their pay, benefits, and other working conditions.

The vote comes just before part-time faculty at Cambridge-based Lesley University are scheduled to vote on whether to join the [Adjunct Action](#) unionization, a [movement](#) backed by the Service Employees International Union.

A growing number of adjuncts at campuses in the Boston-area and elsewhere in the country have pushed to unionize.

In [September](#), adjuncts from Tufts University, which has campuses in Medford, Somerville, Boston and Grafton, became the first local group to unionize in recent years when they voted to join Adjunct Action.

A month later, a vote to unionize Bentley University adjuncts fell just two votes shy of passing.

Eight of the nine Cambridge City Council members voted Monday to pass the [resolution](#), which was proposed by Councilor Leland Cheung. One council member, Dennis J. Carlone, an adjunct faculty member at Lesley University, recused himself from voting.

The approved resolution was for the council to: “go on record expressing support for fair wages and benefits for Cambridge’s adjunct professors, the right of Cambridge’s adjunct professors to form a union, and the adoption of free and fair union election principles, similar to those that have been adopted by many higher education institutions in other U.S. cities, which establish the commitment that workers are ‘free’ to make up their own mind under ‘fair’ voting conditions.”

Shira Karman, who has taught in the Expressive Therapy department at Lesley off and on for three decades, said the council’s support is “exciting and energizing.”

“We’ve received and appreciated support from other corners too; Lesley full-time faculty, Lesley alumni and students are standing with us as we vote to form our union,” she said in a statement from the SEIU.

“I love teaching at Lesley, but too often we feel invisible,” she added. “We, the adjunct

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faculty, need to feel seen and respected because we are a vital part of Lesley community. Adjunct faculty make up a majority of the teaching staff and by achieving greater recognition and integration at Lesley, we will help make Lesley the best institution of higher learning that it can be.”

Adjunct faculty will begin a mail-in voting process on Jan. 31 to decide if they want to unionize.

The local unionization movement has reached out to adjuncts at more than 20 campuses, according to SEIU officials.

“Colleges and universities account for a greater share of employment and payroll in Massachusetts than in almost any other state in the country and post-secondary instructors are among the fastest growing occupations in the state,” the SEIU said in a statement.

“Increasingly, however, the state’s colleges and universities are turning to adjunct faculty to carry out their core mission of teaching while shifting resources from instruction to administration, funded by quickly rising tuition and resulting in record levels of student debt,” the group added. “Adjunct faculty are caught up in this crisis in higher education. Adjuncts, numbering nearly 20,000 statewide, are contingent workers: overworked and underpaid, generally with no job security or access to health and retirement benefits.”

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at [matthew.rocheleau@globe.com](mailto:matthew.rocheleau@globe.com).

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