

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Save Seawolves Athletics Calls on CSU Leadership to Halt Harmful Cuts and Address Real Issues Facing SSU

Rohnert Park, CA — [1/27/2025] — The Save Seawolves Athletics group, a grassroots movement made up of Sonoma State University (SSU) students, alumni, faculty, and community members, is calling for immediate action by the California State University (CSU) Board of Trustees and SSU administration to halt plans to eliminate SSU's athletics programs.

The group strongly opposes the recent proposals to dismantle the athletics department and cut critical academic programs, arguing that they believe these actions are based on potentially faulty and incomplete data, will harm SSU's diverse student body, and fail to address the underlying issues contributing to the university's financial challenges.

"Our primary wish is simple: It's clear that the current leadership, we believe, with little connection to our campus or the wider community, is making decisions that affect the future of this university without properly and in good faith engaging those who are most impacted—students, faculty, staff, alumni and the wider community. We know there are serious issues that need to be addressed, but we believe the answers do not lie in top-down decisions from a detached leadership. The only way forward is through a bottom-up approach, where every stakeholder is valued and heard. The mess we find ourselves in is the result of years of mismanagement by the CSU Board of Trustees and the leadership they've installed, and it is students—our future leaders—who should not pay the price for a decade of their failed leadership."

— Benjamin Ziemer, Spokesperson, Save Seawolves Athletics

Key Points:

- **Faulty Data & Harmful Decisions:**

Save Seawolves Athletics argues that the decision to eliminate athletics and possibly academic programs may be based on inaccurate and incomplete data. These cuts will have a devastating impact on SSU's students, particularly student-athletes, many of whom come from underrepresented communities. The group believes this decision undermines the university's mission and identity as a vibrant, inclusive institution.

- **Real Issue: Administrative Bloat:**

The group points out that the administration's focus on cutting athletics ignores the real issue: growing bureaucratic and administrative bloat at SSU. Despite a declining student and faculty population, administrative budgets appear, based on publicly available data, to have continued to rise. Save Seawolves Athletics also points out that they believe there is one staff member, not including faculty, for every 9 to 11 students at SSU, a ratio that highlights inefficiencies within the administration. The group calls for a more effective approach to budgeting that focuses on eliminating inefficiencies in the administration rather than harming core academic and athletic programs that are central to SSU's identity.

- **Detachment of Current Leadership:**

Save Seawolves Athletics believes that the current leadership, including the president, is disconnected from the real issues facing SSU. With the president having served for less than a year, their lack of continuity and understanding of the campus has led to poor decision-making regarding these proposed cuts. The group also highlights that the interim president, Emily F. Cutrer, missed the most recent public-facing forum on campus to discuss the budget cuts, citing that she was feeling "a bit under the weather." This absence has raised concerns about the leadership's engagement with the SSU community, especially at such a critical moment. She

also left the meeting with the Athletic Department after a short time Wednesday without any notice or reason, leaving her Vice President of Student Affairs to face all questions from the staff. This further exacerbates concerns that leadership is not adequately engaging with the community during a time of critical decisions.

Additionally, in the same public forum, the Vice President for Strategic Enrollment was recorded joking at (minute 23:17), saying that the rising graduation rate was “great for everybody except for me.” This comment, while perhaps intended as humor, raised concerns about the leadership’s accountability for ongoing enrollment challenges under his department’s oversight. Further compounding these concerns, Athletic Faculty have suggested for the past three years that they could be enlisted to help call prospective students, a strategy we understand was adopted by CSU Chico. Although the Vice President for Strategic Enrollment expressed support for the idea, his department has failed to follow through by engaging staff to implement the solution. This lack of follow-up highlights the systemic issues within the administration that need to be addressed, particularly if SSU is to reverse the current trajectory.

- Core Values of SSU Call for a More Thoughtful Approach:

Save Seawolves Athletics also urges the administration and the CSU Board of Trustees to consider the university’s Core Values, which emphasize the very principles under attack by these proposed cuts. Sonoma State’s Core Values include:

- o Diversity & Social Justice: The elimination of athletic programs disproportionately impacts underrepresented and minority students, undermining SSU’s commitment to social justice and inclusivity.

- o Sustainability & Environmental Inquiry: Decisions that reduce vital academic and extracurricular programs, including athletics, limit opportunities for sustainable growth and the full development of students.

- o Connectivity & Community Engagement: The cuts harm the community spirit that defines SSU, where athletics serve as a key source of engagement for students, alumni, and the broader Sonoma County community.

- o Adaptability & Responsiveness: The rushed and poorly communicated cuts fail to adapt to the realities of SSU’s diverse needs, indicating a lack of responsiveness to the voices of students, faculty, and staff.

The proposed cuts directly undermine these values and fail to take into account the broader impact on the community and the long-term health of the university.

- Wider Community Impact:

The ripple effects of these proposed cuts extend far beyond the university itself, deeply affecting the local community and economy.

- o Local Students: Many Sonoma County residents choose SSU for its close-knit campus and its athletic programs, which play a crucial role in student recruitment and retention. Removing these programs will disproportionately harm local students who may now face fewer options for engagement and scholarship opportunities.

- o Local Businesses: Local businesses in Sonoma County, particularly those near the campus, benefit from SSU events, including athletics. Local restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and other service industries experience a significant increase in business from sports events, student activities, and alumni gatherings. Cutting athletics will result in fewer visitors and less spending in the local economy.

- o Community Identity: SSU’s athletics programs are not just a source of pride for students, but also for the broader Sonoma County community. The Seawolves serve as an identity for local

families, alumni, and supporters. The elimination of these programs erodes this shared sense of pride and connection, weakening the university's bond with the surrounding community.

- Request for Legal Action:

In response to these concerns, Save Seawolves Athletics has joined forces with faculty members who have formally requested that the California Faculty Association (CFA) file a legal injunction to halt the proposed cuts. The injunction would stop further actions by the CSU Board of Trustees and allow for a more thorough review of the data, alternatives, and the potential long-term consequences of these decisions—with all stakeholders at the table. Save Seawolves Athletics is also preparing separate legal action seeking transparency, a seat at the table for the Students Athletes Advisory Council (SAAC), the Athletic Department Leadership, the Coaching Staff, donors, alumni, relevant California state Assembly members, Congressional representatives, County Supervisors, and Academic staff—along with the wider student body leadership group representatives.

- Civil Rights Complaint:

The group has also filed a Civil Rights Complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) concerning the disproportionate impact of the athletics cuts on minority and underrepresented students. Save Seawolves Athletics is further preparing to file a civil rights case on behalf of faculty of color, arguing that these cuts will also have a disparate impact on faculty from minority backgrounds.

- Call for Collaborative Solutions:

Save Seawolves Athletics emphasizes that its fight comes from a place of kindness and reasonableness. The group is committed to working with SSU leadership to create a more trusting, collaborative educational environment. They believe that by addressing the real issues and engaging all stakeholders, SSU can thrive and rebuild with a collective effort, celebrating the wonderful institution at its core. The group calls for a shift away from harmful cuts, which they believe will jeopardize the university's legacy and its students' futures, and a move toward more sustainable, community-based solutions.

Save Seawolves Athletics' Demands:

1. Halt the planned cuts to SSU's athletics programs and academic departments.
2. Conduct a thorough review of the financial situation and the administration's practices, specifically addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies.
3. Engage in meaningful dialogue with faculty, students, alumni, and community members to find sustainable solutions.
4. Protect students' and faculty's rights, particularly those from underrepresented communities, from the negative impacts of these cuts.
5. Engage in good faith discussions and collaborate on developing a commonsense path forward that strengthens SSU's community and ensures its long-term viability.

About Save Seawolves Athletics:

Save Seawolves Athletics is a grassroots movement dedicated to preserving the athletics program at Sonoma State University. Comprised of students, alumni, faculty, and community members, the group works to protect SSU's legacy and ensure that SSU remains a place where student-athletes and all students can thrive both academically and athletically.

For media inquiries, please contact:

Spokesperson: Benjamin Ziemer

Phone: [707-888-8125]

Email: [saveseawolvesathletics@gmail.com]