Dear UC Berkeley Parent Coalition for Student Disability Rights:

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the announcement of the discontinuation of the WAIV program. Unfortunately, media reports on the subject have contained incomplete and, in some cases, incorrect information about the scope of disability services that the campus has offered in the past and will continue to offer in the future. We regret the confusion and concerns generated by recent coverage and write now to provide you with comprehensive, factual information.

Here is a summary of the situation:

The Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) contract, signed in Fall 2015, specified the types of services and the duration of the services that were to be provided to clients, including our students who were served by the program. The Personal Vocational Social Adjustment (PVSA) services prescribed by the DOR/Workability IV – or WAIV – contract were limited to providing short-term skills training, including workplace interactions, information on how to request job accommodations, and self-advocacy skills. DOR counselors had to provide written authorization for each training, and the trainings were limited to one to four months. This program was serving only about 60 disabled students – about three percent of the total disabled student population.

This work had been funded through a federal matching grant. The Campus determined that the recent changes in federal regulations and the limitations of the grant were no longer in alignment with the growth of our campus’ disability population and the range of disability needs. However, the campus fully recognizes the value of these services, and is therefore developing a more robust program that is capable of delivering these and many other services for an increased number of students with disabilities.

Specifically, the new Disabled Student Program (DSP) Director and the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion are re-envisioning the DSP service model to meet students’ needs for more dynamic and efficient services. This new service model includes:

- The assignment of a DSP specialist, who has experience and training in working with students on the autism spectrum and others who need support, to immediately begin providing support and services to those 60 students who were PVSA clients. This specialist will continue the weekly social skills group and offer workshops on self-advocacy, self-care, professional etiquette and attire, and more;
- Hiring a new career services professional who is also a disability specialist. This new professional will work in Career Services office and will provide related employment skills training to Disabled Students Program (DSP) students, including those who were served under WAIV. We intend to have this position filled by January 2017;
• Working with the Center for Independent Living to provide services for DSP students on campus including independent living skills and travel training;

• Providing assistive technology consults to students who would like to use this service as a part of their disability management. DSP also has a new grant to conduct outreach to newly admitted students to help them connect sooner with DSP services and staff;

• Engaging a national consultant from College Autism Spectrum to provide training to staff, evaluate our current services and offer guidance in the creation and implementation of other services that might be needed.

Next fall, as a part of the New Student Orientation, DSP will offer an orientation specifically geared to help students with disabilities transition into the Cal environment. The orientation will include connecting students to community and government resources to help them successfully transition to university life and highlight instruction on self-advocacy and working with professors.

We are proud that the Disability Rights Movement was born and cultivated here in the city of Berkeley and on the Cal Campus. We are committed to continuing our legacy of recognizing disability as an important dimension of diversity, empowering our students with disabilities, and serving them in greater and more effective ways.

We believe strongly that your demands will be represented in the new model of planned services.

Karen Nielson, the new DSP Director, is available to talk about these services and she welcomes your feedback and partnership as we move forward to break new ground for persons with disabilities at Berkeley.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Dirks
Chancellor

Na'ilah Nasir
Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion

Cc: Carol Christ, Interim Executive Vice Chancellor & Provost
Nils Gilman, Associate Chancellor and Chief of Staff to the Chancellor
Khira Griscavage, Associate Chancellor and Campus Chief Ethics, Risk & Compliance Officer
Mia Settles-Tidwell, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion
Fabrizio Meijia, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Equity & Success
Karen Nakumura, Robert & Colleen Haas Distinguished Chair of Disability Studies & Professor of Anthropology
Karen Nielson, Director of Disabled Students Program
Derek Coates, Disability Compliance Officer