



Response to Email Sent to All ATK Employees on 6/23/2022

On June 23, ATK employees received an email from Senior VP of HR and Organizational Development Colleen Zelina regarding the upcoming union election. Below we have addressed several points from her email.

In solidarity,

Your friends at ATK United

“ If a majority of your colleagues vote YES in this secret ballot, then every eligible employee will be represented by the union regardless of your vote, and you will all be bound to the collective bargaining agreement whenever it is finalized. There can be no opt out and we expect that everyone will have to pay the union for bargaining with the Company.

The decision to form a union is by majority vote, like many other decisions that are governed by a democratic process. Colleen’s statement is false: If the union wins the election, you maintain the right to not join CWA, and any employee can opt out of being part of the union. You will still receive the same contract as employees in the union; however, you will not have a say in the negotiation process or any other union decisions. You will not pay union dues, but you will pay a non-member agency fee. For more information, read [Your Rights With Respect to Union Representation, Union Security Agreements and Agency Fee Objections](#). We will not have to pay a separate or additional “fee” for the union to bargain with the Company; we pay nothing until we start paying union dues after the contract is voted on and agreed to by the union.

“ Second, we ask that you vote NO.

While ATK management can technically “ask” you to vote no, they legally cannot require you to do so or threaten or penalize you in any way. We simply ask you to consider why they feel strongly enough to send this direct request in an all-staff email. Why don’t they want you to have a voice in how our company makes decisions and allocates resources? If the company really thought a contract would result in lower pay and decreased benefits, then wouldn’t they ask you to vote yes, thus benefitting the company’s bottom line? They are asking you to vote for the management and board’s self-interest rather than that of yourselves, your families, and your coworkers.



“ As an Executive Committee, we have marveled at our unique culture which has fostered a politics-free environment where employees care about one another. This camaraderie and passion for each other and the brand has helped us thrive and sets us apart from others in our industry. It has been our priority to ensure that our business grows while maintaining our forward-thinking environment that incentivizes and rewards our employees.

This camaraderie and passion for each other and the brand has led us to forming this union. We do not anticipate that our culture or our dedication to our work and to moving our brand forward will change when we are unionized; in fact, unionized workplaces statistically have [lower turnover and greater productivity](#) than those without unions.

“ We have been able to increase compensation for colleagues on the lower end of the pay scale, and have made significant adjustments to raise the “floor” for entry-level positions and raise salaries for non-managers, especially in editorial positions and expanded the number of benefits both traditional and non-traditional.

We appreciate the attention given to the lower end of the salary range; however, \$50K as a starting salary is barely [a living wage for Boston](#), a metric that does not allow for savings of any kind, eating out, nor taking vacations. An employee survey conducted by ATK United in early 2022 found that a shocking number of full-time ATK employees need to work a second job to survive. Providing a “subsistence” wage to your employees is not enough, not in line with creating “the best place to work”, nor is it competitive with other workplaces that do similar work. In addition, raising the salary floor for entry-level positions, while certainly a step in the right direction, has caused salary compression in positions hired before the floor was in place. Employees in positions above entry-level should see their salaries adjusted to reflect their years of service and expertise in relation to the new floor.

“ In addition, we have absorbed 100% of the healthcare premium increases the past two years. As a result, employee contributions have not increased since January of 2020, while ATK’s costs have risen 30% to 42% depending on the plan. We offer several different options including one plan in which the company pays for 70% of the premiums.

70 percent is far below the nationwide average employer contribution last year, which was 83 percent per [KFF.org](#). According to [the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), in 2021, New England employers in private industry paid an average of 77% of the cost of healthcare premiums for individual plans, and 69% for family coverage. While we acknowledge that rising healthcare costs are a challenge for employers, we feel there is room for ATK to meet at least these averages, if not exceed them.



“ All benefits, including those employees enjoy now will be subject to the collective bargaining process if employees vote to join a union. Through collective bargaining, employees may continue to enjoy all these benefits, they may get a lesser benefit package or they may get a better benefit package. No one can predict what will happen. Nothing that exists today is guaranteed in the future.

“Nothing that exists today is guaranteed in the future” is exactly the problem with the situation we have now. We are at-will employees. Nothing we have now—not our jobs, not our salaries, not the raises or salary adjustments some were given this past year, none of our benefits—is guaranteed tomorrow. Unionization gives us the opportunity to write a contract that cannot be changed without our input. It would let us establish standards and processes that are transparent and guaranteed, including minimum salaries and standard annual raises that still allow for merit raises and promotions. The threat of a lesser benefit package is nothing more than disinformation. Because any contract needs to be approved by us unionized employees before being ratified, we would obviously not request or agree to a lesser benefit package, or any other terms of salary, benefits, or other concerns important to the unit. Management has consistently vowed to want to do better and make ATK the best place to work; we look forward to partnering with them to do so during the collective bargaining process.

“ In 2021, our turnover rate was 12%, which is significantly less than the industry average. This year, the rate is running at 7%. These numbers suggest that people believe, as we do, that ATK is a good place to work.

A turnover rate of 12% translates to 30 positions at ATK, which represents a significant loss of institutional knowledge, skills, and expertise at our medium-sized company. Departures in 2021 especially impacted content-oriented teams, including recipe developers and editors, without whom our content cannot be produced. Employees have raised concerns about chronic understaffing and overwork across departments for years, but few changes have been made, leading to a significant loss of talent. Unions have been proven to decrease turnover, as “a combination of better pay and benefits, more upward mobility, and the ability to exercise voice gives unionized workers reason to stay.” ([Source](#))

“ We want to work with you directly to build on our progress, not with an outside third-party with little knowledge of our culture and business that you are paying to speak to us on your behalf.

As a reminder, ATK United is not an “outside third party.” CWA may be our bargaining representative—with access to legal and other resources that will be valuable during



negotiation—but this union is entirely made up of your coworkers. During bargaining, the union will be represented by ATK employees chosen by their peers, who will speak on behalf of sub-committees of employees representing all departments. CWA lawyers will translate union demands into contractual language, and will assist union representatives. We are excited to join CWA. We are not “paying” an outside third party for their services. We are joining a democratically governed group of working people from across the country, and funding its efforts collectively with our dues.

We would also like to point out that ATK has retained their own third-party representative: [Ogletree Deakins](#), a “labor and employment law firm representing management” with little knowledge of our culture and business, whom they are paying to help discourage our collective action.

“ Working with you directly, we can work more quickly and more creatively to address your issues and concerns.

Unfortunately, ATK management has shown a poor track record of quickly addressing employee concerns. Per the presentations from the week of June 20th, senior leadership has known about significant concerns about the salary floor since 2015. Yet people were still making approximately \$40K as recently as March 2022, an amount that is shamefully below a living wage for Boston. That isn’t fast enough. For years, employees have repeatedly gone to their managers and to senior leadership with consistent concerns regarding pay, benefits, and workloads, and have been told “there’s nothing we can do.” Unionizing gives employees a seat at the table and a voice in company decisions, which we would argue will be the fastest and most direct way to really understand our issues and concerns. With a union, workers can hold management accountable and work with them to create actual tangible solutions.

“ [Until] the collective bargaining process is concluded, there will be no changes in salaries, benefits, or work conditions. On average, it takes more than one year to complete an initial collective bargaining agreement, and ATK will not be able to make changes in the meantime.

After we win our union vote, we will begin bargaining a contract with the company. ATK management will absolutely be able to implement raises and improve benefits during the bargaining phase before a final contract is ratified; the union will just need to vote on and agree to those improvements. In fact, the company will be required to maintain at least the “status quo” during bargaining. It has been the status quo for the company to implement annual merit increases (of varying percentages), so if they attempt to withhold raises during bargaining, we will apply pressure and argue that they are acting in bad faith.



“ Union representation will add a complex layer of bureaucracy to the business, and could impede our ability to attract top-tier talent.

We would argue that for many positions, hiring and retention is currently hampered—not by our reputation or the quality of our work—but by the low salaries we offer in many essential positions. Given our low salaries, only those with a secondary source of income (from a job/partner/etc.) can accept positions, limiting our pool from a diversity standpoint as well. Once the election is over and contracts have been signed, having clear salary bands, job descriptions and paths for advancement will likely be appealing to people applying to work here.

“ The intimate relationships that staff currently have with their managers will be invariably altered as there will be a third party between us on most issues.

Manager-employee relationships in a unionized office can be exactly the same as in a non-unionized office. You can still discuss concerns directly with your manager and you can still have an excellent relationship with your manager even with a union. An added benefit to working in a unionized workplace is that you have the option to request a union steward (a coworker elected by you and your peers) be present in a meeting to support you if you are experiencing a conflict with your manager and have challenging issues to discuss. Union involvement in your day to day operations and relationship with your manager would be minimal if any, unless you request union support.

“ If you have already signed a union authorization card, worn a pin, liked ATK United content online, you are still free to vote your conscience in the secret ballot election and decide for yourself whether you really want the union to represent you. No one will know how you vote unless you decide to tell them. If you did not sign a card, you still get to vote.

We are concerned that the same email that tells you to “vote your conscience” also includes a direct request that you “vote no.” Workers should be free of pressure from management to sway their vote. And we do truly hope that you vote your conscience, whatever that vote may be. We will continue to meet every coworker with courtesy and respect regardless of the feelings expressed during this discourse, and we appreciate the honesty, candidness, and mutual respect we have received from both sides throughout this process.

We look forward to working with management to make ATK a better place to work during the collective bargaining process should we win our election.