

Students rally behind fired Ramsey employee

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A student-led boycott shortened the lines at Cafe Ramsey this week after the alleged firing of one of its employees.

"We are demanding that, if Bernice McMillan's firing was a direct result of her call to close down Ramsey Cafe early during the snow storm of Feb. 3, that she be offered her job back," said Student Body President Nick Ladd.

Although McMillan's case is still under an appeals process, UNC Asheville's contracted food service company, Chartwells, fired McMillan for closing Cafe Ramsey early the night of Feb. 3 when evening classes were canceled due to inclement weather.

Once the city busses quit running, her usual mode of transportation, she left with a ride a little after 7 p.m., according to Students for Conscious Consumption, a coalition of student-led activist groups and organizer of the Cafe Ramsey boycott.

SFCC met last week with Dean of Students Jackie McHargue and Danny Dawkins, dining services director and campus liaison for Chartwells.

McMillan's firing prompted the coalition's list of demands for Chartwells including an anonymous survey for employees, improved working conditions and a contingency plan for emergencies.

"We protect our students and faculty, but not the people who feed us," said coalition member Ellie Little.

UNCA does not employ dining service employees, however, so university closings or delays do not apply to the food service staff, according to Dawkins.

"There are 1,100 students living on this campus and we have to feed them. That is our number one priority," Dawkins said. "If every associate was able to close a dining facility whenever they wanted, there would be students on this campus with nothing to eat."

Since McMillan's case is still pending, Dawkins could not say much due to Chartwell's corporate confidentiality standards, but he did say McMillan's decision to close Cafe Ramsey violated Chartwell's policy regarding inclement weather.

"Any associate can make a decision, but there is always a way to make that decision," Dawkins said. "I have never, in 12 years, left anyone stranded. I have slept here and drove around to pick employees up and take them home."



Members from SFCC discuss demands with Chartwells representative.



Susan Terry - Staff Photographer

Students enjoyed free bagels and coffee while boycotting the cafe on Feb. 18.

Extreme incidents, like a school shooting, are exceptions to an associate autonomously closing a dining facility, Dawkins said.

Sophomore Lena Eastes considers McMillan a good friend, and strongly advocates for her job reinstatement.

"Bernice needs her job back," Eastes said. "It is what anyone would have done for their safety."

The Cafe Ramsey boycott officially started last Wednesday.

A few students from SFCC and Food Not Bombs, an organization offering alternative food options, set up a small table in front of the library and gave out breakfast pastries and coffee.

While providing free food, coalition members also encouraged students to

sign the petition boycotting the cafe until Chartwell's meets SFCC's demands, including the reinstatement of McMillan.

"The vote was unanimous to go ahead with the protest for today. I wanted to make sure there was a consensus among the group, and no one was strong-arming anyone else," Ladd said.

The boycott only applies to Cafe Ramsey, excluding the dining hall and Highsmith union.

"One of the Cafe Ramsey workers came out to read the petition and see what we were doing," said sophomore and SFCC member Emily Rhyne. "Some of the employees are worried that if a boycott is instated, they might get laid off."

The boycott also addresses the larger issue of how Chartwells treats their em-

ployees, Eastes said. Many employees would like to speak up about working conditions but worry about the consequences, she said.

"A big reason I choose not to be on the meal plan and live off campus even though I am a sophomore is because I don't like the way they run things," Eastes said. "I don't like the way they treat the people there."

One of the most important implementations SFCC demands is an anonymous survey for Chartwell's associates, according to Rhyne.

"They feel like they can't talk because their jobs are in jeopardy," Rhyne said. "We are trying to improve their working conditions and represent them, but in order to do that we have to have an open line of communication with them."

An annual survey is already in practice which employees report to an outside third party, according to Dawkins.

The third party then communicates feedback to the vice president of Compass, Chartwells' umbrella corporation, and it trickles down to regional positions such as Dawkins'.

McHargue also volunteered as a university outlet for staff feedback.

"Our associates do not have to follow the confidentiality guidelines that I do," Dawkins said. "They can say whatever they want about the situation."

The Facebook group, "No Ramsey Cafe Day", consists of more than 800 members.

Dawkins said he worries about the hearsay coming from various members' posts.

"There are some things on Facebook that are just not true. One post says that one of our associates was fired who is working right now," Dawkins said at the meeting last Tuesday.

Chartwells publicly stated that they communicated reinstatement to McMillan, but she has yet to respond. McMillan also never responded to *The Blue Banner's* request for an interview.

"We have a duty to serve the needs of the students and the faculty of UNCA. We have protocols in place to balance both requirements, and they were not followed at this particular location," the company said.

Ladd said SFCC wants to break down

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