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Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Chair, Transportation and the  
Environment

Oversight Committee on Personnel



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (HB 214)

Testimony of Delegate Marc Korman

Thank you Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee. I come before you today to discuss House Bill 214, which would ensure collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants at Maryland's four year institutions. This is identical to legislation that passed out of this committee during the 2019 legislative session and passed the House. As a reminder, the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act would clarify that graduate assistants at the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and Baltimore City Community College are eligible to engage in collective bargaining.

Currently, graduate assistants at Maryland's universities are not eligible to engage in bargaining. But graduate assistants who engage in tasks comparable to that of non-student employees deserve the right to negotiate for better working conditions, wages or other benefits. This legislation would assist students who are obligated to work to make ends meet while furthering their education.

The major objection to this type of legislation seems to be two-fold. First, graduate assistants are not just employees of higher education institutions, but also students, and this legislation would fundamentally change the character of that relationship. Second, the "cost" of collective bargaining, or more specifically, the cost of the results of collective bargaining, are simply too high. A sentence from the National Labor Relations Board's recent Trustees of Columbia University decision dispatches with both claims:

“In sum there is no compelling reason—in theory or in practice—to conclude that collective bargaining by student assistants cannot be viable or that it would seriously interfere with higher education.”

The bill before you is not a pioneering measure. Rutgers, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Washington, University of Iowa, University of Massachusetts and University of Wisconsin all have student workers with the right to collectively bargain.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation to do right by our graduate assistants.