



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 211

State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

January 21, 2025

Unfavorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 211.

On behalf of the University System of Maryland (USM) we respectfully oppose House Bill 211 as written. The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution. There are over 6,100 graduate assistants across the USM.

Why is collective bargaining not necessary for the graduate students and postdoctoral associates in the University System of Maryland?

We have the deepest respect for the world class graduate students and postdoctoral associates in the University System of Maryland (USM). We believe that the successful and ongoing support of effective mentorship, meet and confer processes and transparent grievance procedures are what makes the USM so effective.

We firmly believe that they are students first – not workers. The duties they perform are directly related to their status as students. For most, if not all of them, it is aligned with their training as a scholar and instructor. It is virtually impossible to tease apart anything that is not directly related to their training from the activities they do as a graduate assistant or research assistant. Graduate students who are graduate teaching or research assistants typically receive not only a financial stipend but also tuition remission (i.e., free tuition) and benefits.

USM *Board of Regents Policy III – 7.11 Policy on Graduate Assistantships* provides clear guidance to the campuses on issues the graduate students have raised including, but not limited to mentorship, grievance procedures and meet and confer processes.

Mentorship

Each campus provides support for faculty to enhance their role as mentors to graduate students, my colleagues will expand upon how this work is conducted. Additionally, professional development opportunities are provided to students.

Grievance procedures

The policy also establishes baseline standards for the administration of graduate assistantships, with a commitment to continuous improvement in the status of graduate assistants. This policy requires that campuses have a formal, written graduate assistant grievance policy. Each institution's grievance policy must include fundamental due process protections for the students.

Meet and confer

On all USM campuses with graduate student assistants and researchers, there are regular "meet and confer" sessions. The Chancellor has been very interested in learning more about whether meet and confer has been effective. To that end, he has hosted several meetings with graduate student representatives to get their input on the process. Additionally, we have asked campuses to provide additional information on how the process currently works. We are now circling back with the campuses to ensure that there are regular meet and confer sessions; that information about this process is clearly shared with graduate students and that campus leadership is involved in these meetings.

Post Doctoral Associates

One of my colleagues on the panel will provide greater detail on this group. However, as an example, at the University of Maryland they embrace a definition of postdoctoral scholar utilizing the same general characteristics of the definition published jointly by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health in January 2007, as follows: "[A postdoctoral scholar is] an individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path."

Postdoctoral students are supported by campus research grants or contracts, by fellowships administered by the campus, or by other external sources. Depending on their status, they will receive benefits in addition to their postdoctoral stipend. Postdoctoral students have access to the University Ombuds officers, graduate academic counselors, the teaching and learning center as well as the Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct on the campus.

There will always be a small number of students who are unhappy with the system – we don't discount their voices, and we want to reach out to our students. We want to work with our postdoctoral associates to ensure the best possible educational and training outcomes not only for them, but also those they will be entrusted to educate and train in the future.

As my colleagues share specific examples from our campuses on the ways we support our graduate students and postdoctoral associates, you will see that we work together in a respectful manner to ensure the best outcomes for our students. We are concerned that with collective bargaining, the unique strength of public higher education in Maryland will be lost.

The USM respectfully urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 211.



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