



Office of the President

**Morgan State University Testimony
Dr. David K. Wilson, President**

House Bill 0211 (Delegate Foley et al)
State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral
Associates

Appropriations Committee

January 21, 2025

Unfavorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee. We, at Morgan, thank you for the opportunity to share our position on House Bill 0211. The summary of the Bill states the following: *Providing collective bargaining rights to certain graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at a system institution, Morgan State University, or St Mary's College of Maryland; and establishing separate collective bargaining units for the graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates.*

I submit these comments based on my extensive experience in higher education, including involvement I've had in labor relations and the collective bargaining process, and on behalf of Morgan State University ("Morgan State" or the "University"), where I have proudly served as President since July 1, 2010. I would like to highlight concerns regarding potential disruption to collaborative decision-making processes already in place and the potential negative impact on institutional sustainability, the shift of focus from excellence in teaching, intensive research, and effective public service and community engagement, should this bill pass.

Morgan State University utilizes several entities, including its representative body called the University Council, to provide for a participatory system of governance in order to provide the University community an opportunity for involvement, communication, and accountability in all major decisions. The University Council, which has 37 members (27 faculty, 7 staff, 2 undergraduate students, 1 graduate student) serves as the University's official governance structure involving the administration, faculty, professional administrative staff, classified employees, graduate students, and the undergraduate student body in the ongoing operation of the University. In particular, three faculty members come from each of the nine academic colleges and schools at the University. For academic colleges and schools with graduate programs, at least one of the three representatives shall be a member of the graduate faculty. Two members of the Council are from the University's classified employees. In terms of responsibility, the University Council serves as an advisory body to the president of the University, reviews all proposed policies, and ultimately gives the University's president feedback on such policies. As president,

1700 E. Cold Spring Lane • 400 Truth Hall • Baltimore, Maryland 21251 • (443) 885-3200 • Fax (443) 885-8296

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I take this feedback very seriously and rarely, if ever, have I, in my fifteen years as president, advanced any significant policy to the Morgan State University Board of Regents for action without reaching consensus with the Council. Please also understand that the University Council may also, on its own initiative, make recommendations to me for mine and the Board of Regents consideration with respect to any matter of university-wide significance and impact.

In essence, the University Council serves a valued role in providing all members of the University's community a part in shared governance. It has been my experience in higher ed institutions with collective bargaining within its academic ranks that it has led to slower progress and hindered implementation of initiatives which effectively address the concerns of multiple stakeholders, as already accomplished by the University Council.

Further, a collective bargaining environment can create an extremely adversarial relationship between graduate assistants, and postdoctoral associates, creating the possibility that collective bargaining agreements and the nature of the relationship may prioritize union interests over collaborative solutions, thereby impacting curricular development and alignment with market needs, and resource allocation when resources are very limited, leading to a tense learning environment for students. This legislation would likely lead to the promulgation of union rules for graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates which restrict the autonomy they currently enjoy through course design, pedagogy, and assessment. Similarly, the immense amount of time that the collective bargaining process requires would surely impact their commitment to these aspects of their academic lives.

Enactment of this bill would likely also result in the University's need to hire a significant number of additional personnel to manage relations with additional bargaining units. These new employees would entail a significant added expense to the University at a time when our operating budget is being reduced by over \$12 million annually. Moreover, these new employees, along with incumbent employees, would require substantial training and be tasked with additional responsibilities to remain in compliance with labor relations laws. Diverting focus from core academic functions to complex administrative procedures to comply with union and collective bargaining obligations will only further the strain on already financially burdened administrative departments.

Morgan State University remains firmly committed to the success of all graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates. However, a collective bargaining environment for all graduate assistants, and postdoctoral associates will not lead to an enhancement of that success.

Therefore, Morgan State University respectfully urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 211/Senate Bill 166.

Sincerely,



David K. Wilson
President, Morgan State University