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HB 214 - Higher Education - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants (Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act)
House Appropriations Committee
January 28, 2020

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards
President
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support HB 214 - Higher Education - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants (Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act). On behalf of the 340,000 union members I submit the following comments.

Currently, the University of Maryland system considers Graduate Assistants as students, not workers. This, unfortunately, means that GAs do not have the right to collectively bargain for better wages and benefits. The “meet and confer” process – a University compromise meant to mollify students who fought for collective bargaining in 2012 – has failed to address key concerns of Graduate Assistants, mainly on issues of stipends, intellectual property rights, and family leave. Unions know that the only way for workers to fully realize their rights in the workplace is by bargaining with their employers. For Graduate Assistants at the University System of Maryland, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, and Morgan State University, the time has come to have a seat at the bargaining table.

Collective bargaining for college students is not new, unique, or different. Currently, student workers have this right at the University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of Illinois, and the University of California at Berkley. These are universities that – in the case of Wisconsin – have had collective bargaining rights for student workers for decades. Far from seeing any ill effects that are constantly promulgated by those who oppose collective bargaining, these universities are thriving, and the student workers on their campuses have the additional protections afforded them through speaking with one voice at the bargaining table.

It is time to give Graduate Assistants a say in their working conditions. It is time to give them the right to collectively bargain for themselves, and **for these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on HB 214**