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**SB 658 - Higher Education - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants (Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act)
Senate Finance Committee
February 21, 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 SB 658 - 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 (GA) 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. The only way for workers to fully realize their rights in the workplace is by bargaining with their employers. Graduate Assistants at the University System of Maryland, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, and Morgan State University, need and have earned the right to collectively bargain.

Collective bargaining for college students is not new, unique, or different. Currently, thirty universities, including the University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of Illinois, and the University of California at Berkeley have collective bargaining for graduate assistants. 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 SB 658