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**Written Testimony from American Federation of Teachers-Maryland
Submitted by Todd Reynolds, Ph.D., Political Coordinator
SB 521 State Personnel – Collective Bargaining
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 17, 2021**

SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Todd Reynolds, and I am the Political Coordinator for the American Federation of Teachers in Maryland. I also previously was the president of the graduate student labor union at the University of Florida, and the lead organizer for the AFT in its campaign to grant grad students collective bargaining rights from 2009-2013. On behalf of the American Federation of Teachers in Maryland, I submit this testimony to call for a favorable report for SB 521, the bill that will grant graduate assistants the right that thousands of graduate assistants enjoy at numerous top-tier universities across the nation—the right to engage in collective bargaining.

Arguments against this fundamental right, largely from University System administration, ignore two key facts: collective bargaining 1) exists for graduate assistants at numerous peer institutions, and 2) also supports, not undercuts, the concept of “shared governance” in our state universities in the United States. At institutions where the academic workers do engage in collective bargaining, they still do have strong structures of shared governance in the form of graduate student councils. Collective bargaining generally deals with conditions of employment, and has legal structures in place to assure agreements are enforceable and disputes are resolved objectively. In issues of employment, collective bargaining is actually a guarantee that university administration will truly share governance with graduate workers in determining how the university will work, not just take grad workers concern under advisement.

Madam chair and members of the committee, we know that collective bargaining works both in Maryland’s public agencies—including the non-academic staff in our universities—and throughout public higher ed institutions in the United States. Of the University of Maryland’s self-identified 5 peer institutions, 4 of them

- UCLA,
- UC Berkeley,
- The University of Michigan, and
- the University of Illinois

have collective bargaining for graduate assistants.

The majority of universities in the Big 10 (including the two mentioned above)

- The University of Minnesota,
- The University of Iowa,
- the University of Wisconsin-Madison,
- Michigan State University,
- Penn State University, and
- Rutgers University

grant collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants, and the majority of top ten public universities in the United States—defined by the 2018 US News and World Report ranking of public universities—have collective bargaining for graduate assistants as well. It is clear that collective bargaining does not harm the academic standing of the university. Most recently, the graduate assistants at Georgetown University in the District of Columbia formed a union and have been bargaining collectively with their administration on a contract that will govern the conditions of employment. As more and more top higher education institutions gain this right, Maryland is in danger of falling behind peer institutions who recognize that graduate employees are doing a significant share of the work of a given college, and should be treated with the respect and dignity that can only come when both labor and management sit down at the bargaining table as equals to draft a collectively-bargained labor contract.

Madam chair and members of the committee, Graduate Assistants do the work of the university by teaching the courses offered to undergrads, and oftentimes doing the research that the University uses to benefit the residents of the state. For these reasons, we ask this committee give a favorable report to SB 521. Thank you.