



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0521 entitled “State Personnel – Collective Bargaining” at the 2021 Maryland General Assembly

Written Testimony from the University System of Maryland Student Council
February 16, 2021

The University System of Maryland Student Council (USMSC) represents over 172,000 students across 12 higher education institutions and three regional centers. The USMSC works to collectively listen and identify the concerns most relevant to our student constituents. Of perennial importance is the fair and equitable treatment of student employees. Graduate student employees have become an essential part of the workforce at many higher education institutions across the state fulfilling key teaching, research and administrative roles. Unfortunately, the current language in Maryland State law which was introduced in the early 2000s has proven to be very detrimental.

The USMSC members have listened and read student stories and have facilitated a number of cross-campus conversations on the matter which led to overwhelming support for the provisions in SB0521. We heard very clearly why the right needs to be restored because the current meet and confer process is not effective. The meet and confer process is no replacement for a right to have actual collective voice and leverage in situations already rife with disproportionate power dynamics. Often graduate student employees are rendered powerless due to the nature of institutional relationships and their fragile positions whereby their academic progress, income, health insurance and (when applicable) visas are inextricably intertwined with their student jobs/assistantships when advisors and supervisors are one and the same.

Furthermore, SB0521 allows for the flexibility and autonomy wanted by each school to adapt as best fits their needs to the provisions the bill allows. This format the USMSC viewed as a win-win and the best path forward for improving the various campus cultures surrounding the understanding and value of graduate student roles.

We thank Senator Kramer for sponsoring SB0521 which speaks to tangible actions that can relieve some burden on students and their families. We also thank the numerous senators co-sponsoring this bill lending their support for hardworking students who need action to improve their quality of life. We believe that graduate assistants deserve the same basic rights and protections granted to other state employees: a legally-enforceable seat at the table, and a say over their own working conditions. We view this legislation as a necessary action to support our student employees in the state of Maryland.

The USMSC membership voted in overwhelming support of the proposed bill and hope the bill receives a favorable vote in the MGA this year. Thank you for your time and consideration.



Sincerely,

The USMSC Student Council, representing student leadership from:

Bowie State University

Coppin State University

Frostburg State University

Salisbury University

The Universities at Shady Grove

Towson University

University of Baltimore

University of Maryland, Baltimore

University of Maryland, College Park

University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science

University of Maryland Eastern Shore

University of Maryland Global Campus