



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 15 · MONTGOMERY COUNTY

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Testimony: HB751 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining

Committee: Appropriations Committee

Hearing Date: February 15, 2022

I am Delegate Linda Foley and I am presenting HB 751, State Personnel - Collective Bargaining, which would enable graduate assistants at University System of Maryland schools, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland the opportunity to unionize and have access to collective bargaining rights.

Last year, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation to enable employees, faculty and staff, at community colleges throughout the state to organize into unions. Many other employees within the University System of Maryland already enjoy collective bargaining rights. In fact, this legislature has a long history of supporting collective bargaining rights for state employees. Graduate assistants, which is the focus of HB 751, should not be different.

For more than 20 years, graduate assistants have been advocating for the right to bargain over their wages, hours, and working conditions. Instead, these employees have been referred to a non-enforceable meet and confer process which does little to ensure their work issues are addressed.

The reality is, the meet and confer process does not work. In his cross-filed bill hearing, Senator Benjamin Kramer pointed out that the meet and confer process does not require any resolution by university administration other than to listen to graduate assistants. To add insult to injury, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Maryland, College Park did not even hold a meet and confer meeting in 2020.

Representatives of the University of Maryland argued during the Senate hearing that graduate assistants were not candidates for collective bargaining because they only worked 20 hours per week. In reality, for the past 15 years, many graduate assistants have regularly worked more than 20 hours per week. In 2006, a yearly survey showed that 36% of graduate assistants worked more than 20 hours. In 2016, the average number of hours worked was 23, and one year later it was 27. However, the number of hours worked notwithstanding, any employee who works, no matter if it's 20 hours or 40 hours per week, has the right to collective bargaining. The universities representatives' argument distracts from the main point of this bill: These employees have the right to collectively bargain just as their peer staff members do.

Another argument made in the Senate hearing by university representatives is that collective bargaining will hurt the mentor-mentee relationship between graduate assistants and their supervising advisors. However, several studies have proven otherwise. A 2013 study published in the Industrial and Labor Relations Review showed that unionization actually had no



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impact or, in many cases, a positive impact on faculty/student mentoring. From my own long history as a labor union leader, I speak from personal experience that collective bargaining creates an efficient and formal process to address problems and issues within the workplace and get them resolved.

The pandemic demonstrated the need for collective bargaining for graduate assistants. While other employee groups had the opportunity to bargain for better COVID-related protective equipment and working conditions, graduate assistants could not, and thus, were subjected to unfair and unsafe work environments with little voice to change them.

If they had been union-represented staff members, these graduate assistants would have been safer. Other staff and faculty at universities and community colleges have the opportunity to enter into collective bargaining agreements. Graduate assistants deserve this right also. The University System of Maryland and these institutions are fearful, not “fearless”, and it’s time we stop talking the talk and now walk the walk for graduate assistants at Morgan State University, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, and University System of Maryland schools. I urge a favorable report on HB 751.