

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of NIH Fellows United/UAW Local 2750, representing 5000 postbaccalaureate, predoctoral, postdoctoral, visiting, clinical, and research fellows at the National Institutes of Health, we are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 0166, which would provide collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at University System of Maryland institutions, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

As unionized scientists at our nation's premier biomedical research institution, we understand firsthand how collective bargaining rights strengthen scientific excellence. Our members come from diverse academic backgrounds, including many who experienced both unionized and non-unionized environments during their graduate studies. Their varied perspectives offer valuable insights into how unionization can address the challenges facing graduate students while advancing research quality.

Enclosed you will find testimony from several of our members supporting SB0166. These personal accounts demonstrate the compatibility of union representation with scientific achievement and highlight the crucial role that collective bargaining can play in creating sustainable working conditions for researchers.

We stand in solidarity with University of Maryland graduate students, who have already demonstrated overwhelming support for unionization with over 60% signing authorization cards. The passage of HB0211 would recognize their right to democratic representation in their workplace and strengthen Maryland's position as a leader in scientific research and education.

Thank you for your consideration.

In solidarity,

NIH Fellows United/UAW Local 2750

Dr. Marjorie Levinstein

I am Dr. Marjorie Levinstein, and I am writing to express my strong support for legislation that would enable graduate students at the University of Maryland to form a labor union. As a scientist at the National Institutes of Health and a former graduate student, I bring both personal experience with graduate education and current perspective as a unionized federal employee in the scientific workforce.

Graduate students form the backbone of university research operations, conducting critical experiments, advancing scientific knowledge, and teaching undergraduate courses. Yet they face persistent challenges that unionization could help address. As a unionized graduate student at the University of Washington, I experienced firsthand the difference that collective bargaining rights can make. Our union ensured fair stipends that reflected local living costs and protected against overwork. In contrast, many of my colleagues at other institutions were forced to take second jobs despite their already demanding research and teaching responsibilities, ultimately detracting from their academic work and mental wellbeing. From my experience as both a unionized graduate student and now as a unionized federal scientist, I can attest to how crucial these protections are for enabling researchers to focus on their work.

The issues extend beyond compensation. Graduate students often lack comprehensive healthcare coverage, particularly for mental health services and family care. They can face harassment or mistreatment with limited recourse for addressing grievances. Perhaps most pervasively, there is often no clear limit on working hours or scope of responsibilities, leading to systematic overwork that impacts both their wellbeing and the quality of their research.

As a current unionized scientist and member of our bargaining committee at the NIH, I have direct experience with how collective bargaining creates mechanisms to address these exact challenges. My role in negotiations has shown me how unions can effectively fight for workplace improvements while maintaining the highest standards of scientific excellence. My union ensures we have clear workplace protections, standardized grievance procedures, and a real voice in decisions that affect our working conditions. These protections haven't diminished the quality or impact of our research; rather, they've created an environment where scientists can focus more fully on their work.

The University of Maryland's graduate students have already demonstrated their strong desire for these basic workplace protections, with over 60% having signed union authorization cards. Despite this clear majority support, their request for voluntary recognition of their union has not been granted. Enabling them to unionize would strengthen, not weaken, the university's research enterprise by creating more sustainable working conditions for the next generation of scientists and scholars. It would bring the university in line with peer institutions that have already recognized graduate student unions, including the University of California system, University of Michigan, Harvard University, and, as previously stated, University of Washington.

The success of my own federal research career, built on the foundation of my graduate education, demonstrates that strong worker protections and scientific excellence are fully compatible. I urge you to support this important legislation and give University of Maryland graduate students the opportunity to form a union.

Milo Taylor

My name is Milo Taylor and I am a postbaccalaureate scientist at the National Institutes of Health and am currently applying to MD/PhD programs. I am a proud member and union organizer with the NIH Fellows United union and am writing to express my strong support for legislation that would enable graduate students at the University of Maryland to form a labor union. I have seen the positive impact that union membership and solidarity has on the productivity and culture of a scientific workplace like the NIH and firmly believe that graduate students at the University of Maryland should have the ability to democratically elect to unionize.

Graduate students are an invaluable part of a university workforce that support undergraduate education through teaching positions and make crucial scientific discoveries to support the institutional mission. This being the case, a well-supported graduate student body has a far reaching impact in promoting novel discoveries and a vibrant academic culture across all levels of the university. And who better to answer the question of how to best support graduate students in this mission than the graduate students themselves? Over 60% of the University of Maryland graduate students have demonstrated the desire to have a voice in this process through signing union authorization cards. Despite this clear majority consensus, these students have been denied their request for voluntary recognition of their union.

The University of Maryland has much to gain if these graduate students are granted the ability to unionize. When applicants like myself are considering which institution to attend for training, many are taking note of the institutions with graduate student unions. The resources and protections available to these students at these institutions draw talented students, who enrich the research program and often choose to stay within the institution due to the sustainable working conditions the union facilitates. Unionization also often decreases the barriers to accepting an offer to a program for strong candidates from diverse backgrounds. In order for the University of Maryland to competitively recruit stellar applicants who are also applying to unionized programs at institutions like Harvard University, the University of California system, the University of Michigan, and the University of Washington, graduate student voices must be heard. Passing this legislation to allow graduate students to unionize is an investment in the future of higher education in this state, both for students at the University of Maryland and at other institutions. I hope you will stand with the University of Maryland graduate students and vote to allow them to form a union.

Dr. Haley Chatelaine

My name is Dr. Haley Chatelaine, and I am a postdoctoral fellow at the National Institutes of Health, as well as an organizer, member, and elected bargaining committee member with NIH Fellows United. I am writing today in vehement support of the legislation that would enable graduate students at the University of Maryland to form a labor union.

I did not have rights to collective bargaining or union representation during my graduate school career. I have seen firsthand the kinds of protections it is possible to win through collective bargaining: enforceable protections from bullying and harassment, dedicated time to professional development, job stability protections that prevent at-will firing, and more. Now that I have seen what is possible, I firmly believe all graduate students need access to this invaluable tool for both democratic and scientific progress.

I was bullied and isolated in graduate school with no recourse, which put significant strain on my ability to conduct my doctoral research. I published first author papers, helped to establish my advisor's lab as her first student, and graduated with a number of accolades. However, all of this was in spite of substantial mental and emotional obstacles, begging the question of how much more productive my science could have been if I had the power to directly address them, as we can now as unionized scientists at NIH. If I could go back in time knowing what I know now about how much better my research could have been in a unionized workplace, I would not have selected a graduate school without collective bargaining protections.

If this is my story as one person, there are doubtless more—and likely even more extreme—stories among the more than 4000 graduate students at the University of Maryland. But these same students will not stand for experiences, like these, that hamper discovery: they are standing for progress. The fact that more than 60% of graduate students have signed union authorization cards and are standing up to fight for the better conditions we know are possible is a testament to the strength of these graduate workers and the potential they have to change the tide of academia. I urge you to stand with them and the advancement they represent by supporting legislation that enables them to form a union. They are the future of our state's academic progress. They deserve access to the protections that will empower them to launch that future into the highest echelons.

Emilya Ventriglia

My name is Emilya Ventriglia and I am a PhD student working at the National Institutes of Health. I am writing to you to express the significant role academic worker unions play in making universities safe, attractive, and tenable places to work.

For graduate and postdoctoral workers, decisions about accepting offers increasingly depend on whether a university can provide fair benefits and pay that cover basic living expenses. With increasingly rising costs of living, it's becoming unsustainable for academic workers to simply make ends meet, let alone start families or buy homes. This instability undermines the important work we do—from educating the next generation to advancing research in areas like climate change, national security, or treatments for cancer. Unions are a proven way to ensure these standards are met so that the academic workers can focus on their work.

Academic worker unions are also integral for protecting women and minorities from workplace harassment and bullying, which remain pervasive issues in academia. A 2018 report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that **58% of women in academia have experienced sexual or gender-based harassment**, ranking research careers second only to the military. This toxic culture not only harms individuals but also diminishes research integrity and pushes talented women and gender minorities out of fields critical to advancing our future as a society. Strong unions have been essential to addressing these systemic issues.

Giving public university workers in Maryland the same rights to unionize that hundreds of thousands of academic workers across the country already enjoy would make Maryland's public universities better: more welcoming, inclusive, and sustainable workplaces that remain known as exceptional institutions of higher learning. By continuing to deny these rights, we risk falling behind other states, undermining our ability to attract and retain top talent.

Dr. Matthew Brown

I am Dr. Matthew Brown, and I am a postdoctoral researcher at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda. I am writing in support of bill SB0166 to allow graduate students and postdoctoral associates at public universities in Maryland to unionize. As a member of NIH Fellows United/UAW 2750, I know that union membership enhances my work and strengthens the research community. If Maryland does not allow its graduate students and postdoctoral associates to unionize, it will cripple the valuable, taxpayer-funded institutions that help educate the citizens of Maryland and make Maryland one of the best states in the country to pursue academic research.

I am fortunate enough to have firsthand experience being a unionized graduate student in the state of Maryland. I am a former member of Teachers and Researchers United (TRU)/UE 197 at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where I completed my PhD in neuroscience. While my official title at the university was graduate student, I *worked* for that university. During my time there, I taught students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Moreover, I spent countless hours producing fundamental research that would go on to be presented at meetings throughout the country and published in scientific journals internationally. Each time my work was presented, it came with my affiliation to Johns Hopkins University. The university, from its day-to-day operations to its historic, sterling reputation, relies in part on the work of its graduate students. TRU helped guarantee that my work, along with the thousands of other graduate students at Johns Hopkins University, would not be interrupted by things like late paychecks or unsafe work environments. Graduate students deserve the right to collective bargaining like any other worker who ensures the success of their university.

Even before I was a graduate student, I personally benefited from growing up in the environment around the University of Maryland. As a high school student at Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, we could feel our proximity to the university. My classmates and I could interact with the university, often through the volunteer efforts of hard-working graduate students. Public universities not only benefit their students, but their communities as well. Motivated, enthusiastic graduate students are a large part of that phenomenon. They deserve a say in the work that they do, and they deserve the opportunity to unionize.

Dr. Ulisse Bocchero

My name is Dr. Ulisse Bocchero and I am a visiting postdoctoral researcher at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda. I want to express my strong support in favor of the bill SB0166, which will allow PhD students and postdoctoral researchers at public universities in Maryland to form a union.

I am a member of NIH fellows united UAW 2750 and as a visiting researcher, I am glad that international fellows can count on the help and support guaranteed from our union. International fellows face huge challenges in navigating United States laws, immigration and visa system, and often move here with their families, needing some extra support, for example for health insurance and childcare costs.

As fellows, we recently won our first contract as federal workers at the NIH. With this historic win, fellows will have legally protected benefits, will be able to voice their needs and improve our working conditions.

Our union allows our voices to be heard and our contract will reflect the importance of our indispensable contribution to research.

Unionized researchers in Maryland public universities will help boost the enrollment internationally and domestically, attracting the best talents and providing solid ground for their successful careers.