



## SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

### Senate Bill 166—State Personnel—Collective Bargaining—Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

January 30, 2025

*Unfavorable*

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 166.

I'm privileged to be joined by my colleagues, Dr. David Wilson, president of Morgan State University, and Dr. Stephen Roth, associate provost and dean of graduate studies at the System's flagship, the University of Maryland, College Park.

The University System of Maryland respectfully opposes SB 166. Our position comes not *despite* the great respect we hold for our graduate assistants and postdoctoral students—the value we place on them and their work—but *because* of it.

This bill and its implications are not an abstraction for me. As I sit here today, I am the teacher of these students. I've been privileged throughout my career—as a medical school dean, as a university president, and now as chancellor of a university system—to continue in my role as an educator.

I currently teach students across the System once a week in my medical practice. And this relationship between teacher and student, mentor and mentee, is very special. I believe that nothing should come between it—no law or structure that places limits on how we can interact with one another and resolve issues that impact our students' education.

And let me be clear that we consider graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates *students*—first and foremost. Their duties are not only tightly aligned with their training as scholars and instructors; their duties are intended to advance their work as both.

Right now, if a student has a problem that impinges on their learning, conditions that impact their ability to succeed, they can bring the problem to the attention of their teachers and administrators. And we can mediate solutions through the Meet & Confer process.

Meet & Confer *also* isn't an abstraction for me. When I was president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, we had a strong Meet & Confer process. And it was through this process that graduate and professional students brought to our attention that their health benefits were

inadequate. Through Meet & Confer, we worked with our health providers to secure for them the coverage they needed.

To ensure that Meet & Confer works well *across* the System, my colleagues and I have worked closely with the graduate student representatives of the USM Student Council. Our goals are to strengthen Meet & Confer, to ensure that students and administrators are aware of and trained in the process; that regular Meet & Confer sessions are held on every campus; and that university leaders actively engage in these sessions and resolve, in good faith, the issues brought forth.

With Senate Bill 166, however, these lines of communication will be cut—I believe to the detriment of our graduate students, professional students, and postdocs, and to the very education and training that brought them to us in the first place.

On another note entirely, I do want to acknowledge that—in light of the Trump administration’s recent freezing of grant funds—we’re monitoring closely the fate of federal support that graduate and research assistants bring into our universities. These are uncertain times, and it’s not clear to anyone at what level the grant pipeline will continue to fund operations.

The USM respectfully urges an unfavorable report on SB 166.

