

**FAVORABLE**  
**Senate Bill 166**  
**State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Graduate Assistants and**  
**Postdoctoral Associates**

**Senate Finance Committee**  
**January 30, 2025**

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**Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) supports Senate Bill 166. This legislation would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at an institution within the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, or St. Mary's College of Maryland. We strongly support the expansion of collective bargaining rights to these workers, and this legislation is long overdue.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents over 40 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

For far too long, many workers in Maryland's public sector have been unable to enjoy the freedom to collectively bargain through their unions. Maryland's development of public sector collective bargaining for workers has been piecemeal, incremental, and insufficient to meet the needs of working families, especially when compared to other states public sector collective bargaining systems.<sup>1</sup> Senate Bill 166 makes meaningful progress to correct

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland State Labor Boards, *Public Schools, Higher Education, State Employees*, slides 7-8 (2014) (noting the development of public sector collective bargaining for certain state employees and higher education employees developed from 1996 – 2012), retrieved from: <https://laborboards.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2014/05/Powerpoint-for-Shanghai-Delegation-Feb-2013.pdf>; See also, Jimmy Tarlau, *Many Workers in Md. Don't Have the Right to Form a Union. That Needs to Change*, Maryland Matters (May 20, 2021), <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2021/05/20/jimmy-tarlau-many-workers-in-md-dont-have-the-right-to-form-a-union-that-needs-to-change/>.

this historical error, by extending collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates.

Collective bargaining for graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates is neither unique, nor is it novel. The State of California is one of the most prominent areas where graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates can unionize and engage in collective bargaining within the University of California system.

Moreover, there is a long practice of collective bargaining in institutions of higher education across the country that demonstrates the success and flexibility of collective bargaining. Numerous states grant higher education workers the right to collectively bargain, regardless of the partisan lean of the state. For example, the state of Nebraska enacted a broad public sector collective bargaining legal system approximately fifty years ago, which included faculty in higher education.<sup>2</sup> Collective bargaining relationships in Nebraska persist to this day between institutions of higher education and labor unions representing faculty and other higher education workers.<sup>3</sup> Again, these collective bargaining relationships have persisted for decades and continue to the present.<sup>4</sup>

Every worker, whether they are in the private sector or the public sector, deserves a seat at the table with their employer to discuss their working conditions. The dignity of labor requires that all workers be able to enjoy the fundamental right to collectively bargain with their fellow workers. There is no rational basis to continue to deny or delay collective bargaining rights for workers, including graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates. We continue to urge lawmakers to enact policies that lift up the voices of workers and recognize the dignity of labor.

## **We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 166.**

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<sup>2</sup> See, *American Association of University Professors, University of Nebraska Chapter, University of Nebraska v. Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, et al.*, 198 Neb. 243 (1977) (defining bargaining units of faculty across the Nebraska higher education system).

<sup>3</sup> See, Collective Bargaining Agreement between The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska and the University of Nebraska at Omaha Chapter American Association of University Professors (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023), [https://www.unomaha.edu/academic-affairs/\\_files/documents/compliance/collective-bargaining-agreement.pdf](https://www.unomaha.edu/academic-affairs/_files/documents/compliance/collective-bargaining-agreement.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See Collective Bargaining Agreement between the University of Florida Board of Trustees and the United Faculty of Florida (2021 – 2024), <https://uff-uf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-2024-UFF-UF-Collective-Bargaining-Agreement.pdf>.