

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
SB 166
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining –
Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates
January 30, 2025
SUPPORT**

Good afternoon, Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. AFT-Maryland is the state federation for a number of public K-12 education, public higher education, and public employee unions in our state, representing over 20,000 employees in the Baltimore Teachers Union, the Maryland Classified Employees Association, the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, and the full-time faculty at Montgomery College, Howard County Community College, Prince George's Community College, Frederick Community College, Hagerstown Community College, Baltimore City Community College, Chesapeake Community College, and the Community College of Baltimore County. On behalf of these workers, we call for a favorable report to SB 166, the bill that would lift the unfair exemption to collective bargaining rights to graduate workers and postdoctoral associates employed by our public university's academic workforce.

For decades, Maryland has recognized collective bargaining as an effective vehicle for public employees to engage in meaningful, good-faith conversations with state administrators and management on working conditions that govern their employment. In 2000, the legislature extended this right to the non-academic workers at the state's public 4 year institutions. And in 2021, the state extended this right to the non academic and the academic workforce at the state's community colleges. Additionally, under the presidency of Joe Biden, these rights have been extended by the National Labor Relations Board to academic workers at private institutions, including Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, where graduate assistants voted by 97% to engage in collective bargaining. It just no longer makes sense to exclude academic workers at our state's 4 year institutions from a fundamental human right enjoyed by so many others in our state.

Contrary to what administration officials have argued in the past regarding collective bargaining for graduate assistants, having a union relationship on the campus helps, not hinders, a graduate student's own academic progress. Placing an objective, collectively negotiated standards for a graduate employee's work for the university, whether that is in a teaching or

research capacity has, as studies have shown, made the expectations between a graduate assistant and her or his supervisor much clearer. Furthermore, there are many graduate assistants whose academic work plays no role in their academic progress. For example, it is possible for a graduate student to complete her or his degree without ever becoming a graduate assistant. Likewise, for a graduate student in, say, English or Political Science, may have an assistantship teaching a course which has nothing to do with their own academic work, or working as an administrative assistant managing an office and answering phones. Assistantships like this are quite common across the University System of Maryland.

Nine of the schools of the Big 10, of which the University of Maryland is a part, allow for collective bargaining for their graduate assistants, and many of those institutions also allow for their faculty to engage in collective bargaining if they so choose. Additionally, numerous states in our region, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware allow for collective bargaining for the academic workforce at their public 4-year institutions.

The measures the university administration has in place for academic workers to express and attempt to resolve workplace concerns just is not working. Whether it be through the meet-and-confer process— in which the graduate assistants have been testifying before you for years regarding the ineffectiveness of this process— or through shared governance bodies of graduate student governments, it must be noted that those bodies have merely advisory roles to management decisions. Indeed, if these shared governance bodies were anything other than an attempt to make it appear employee voices were taken seriously, the university administration would already be engaging in collective bargaining as a number of these shared governance bodies have called for passage of this bill.

Maryland has long recognized the fundamental, human right of employees to band together in a shared interest to engage with their employers in collective bargaining. Let us correct this mistake and lift the exception for our 4 year higher education academic workers by passing SB 166. We call for a favorable report. Thank you.