

My name is Colin McCarthy. I'm third year PhD student in the College of Education at the University of Maryland – College Park. I also teach an undergraduate course, I'm a teaching assistant, I conduct research, I update the department website, I design the PhD handbook for incoming students, and I'm a father of a one-and-a-half-year-old baby girl.

All that I, along with my other grad workers are asking for is a fair shot at improving our working conditions and livelihoods. Over 65% of us have chosen to join the United Auto Workers in pursuit of forming a union to achieve these goals. We are not asking any favor of you, only that we be granted the same rights as hundreds of thousands of other grad workers have across the country, the right to negotiate.

The University could voluntarily recognize our union, but they have refused to do so, despite many attempts allowing for that to happen. Passing this bill would not give us more money or better working conditions, it would simply give us the opportunity to have a seat at the table.

Graduate workers perform the essential labor keeping the university running: we teach, grade, mentor, conduct research, manage projects, run programs, and are the forward-facing people who represent the state and the university through countless hours of labor every day. All we're asking for is to have the opportunity to be respected and recognized for our work.

Nineteen other states – both red and blue – have included public university graduate workers in collective bargaining rights law.

At public universities, 33% of students have a union contract. At private schools it's sixty percent. Graduate Student Employees are unionizing faster than any other occupation in the country – increasing 133% percent since 2012. The lack of collective bargaining rights guaranteed in Maryland has and will continue to hurt the University System as we lose top-tier talent to better offers at unionized schools. Not to mention it doesn't necessarily look great from a PR standpoint the University pays just above the 150% poverty threshold in one of the most expensive areas to live in the U.S.

I could not be there to testify today because there are no options for childcare that are offered for grad students, or any I can afford on the stipend I receive. But it's not just about pay. It's about legally enforceable employment contracts, which we don't currently have. It's about protections from vindictive policies and practices, access to resources to do the work we were hired for. It's about fair distribution of workload and hours – I personally do two extra jobs on campus I don't get paid for but are necessary for the University. It's about equity for international students whose visa statuses are not guaranteed for the length of their program and are in an even more precarious position because of some of those aforementioned vindictive policies.

This is about democracy, improving the university, and saying who we are as Maryland. This bill is an opportunity for Maryland to move closer to its goal of being the state it wants to be, showing the rest of the country who we really are. Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I hope someday my child, your children, our grandchildren can benefit from the actions we all took here today.