

# **SB0166\_Collective\_Bargaining\_Graduate\_Assistants\_P**

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



## TESTIMONY FOR SB0166

### State Personnel – Collective Bargaining Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Kramer

**Committee:** Finance

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Cecilia Plante, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0166 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

The rights of workers to organize and to bargain collectively with employers ensures that both workers and management come to the table as equals. Workers have organized in many different industries and have been able to ensure that they have good working conditions, health care, and reasonable wages. It does cost employers more. There is absolutely no argument about that. Employers will always say that they can't afford to have workers organize because it eats into their profits, and often they prevail.

Our members would respectfully ask you to look at this from the side of the workers. Is it right for an employer to pay sub-standard wages, or provide poor working conditions so that THEY can make more profit, at the expense of their workers? A business should be able to pay a decent wage and provide decent working conditions or they don't deserve to be in business. They are leaches.

The same is true at state-run colleges, such as Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland, which often take advantage of their graduate assistants and postdoctoral assistants, who are just learning to negotiate. Colleges should not be operating by taking advantage of workers. They should be enthusiastic in their support for good working conditions and good wages, and should welcome organizing and collective bargaining. They should be showing by example how a good business relationship works. After all, isn't this what they want their students to learn in the first place?

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee

**SB 166 AFSCME Council 3 Testimony\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Christian Gobel

Position: FAV



1410 Bush Street (Suite A)  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
Phone: 410-547-1515  
Email: [info@afscmemd.org](mailto:info@afscmemd.org)

Patrick Moran – President

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**SB 166 – State Personnel – Collective Bargaining –  
Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Association  
Finance Committee  
January 30, 2025**

**FAVORABLE**

AFSCME Council 3 stands in strong support of Senate Bill 166. This legislation establishes collective bargaining rights for certain graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at a system institution, Morgan State University, or St. Mary's College of Maryland. The legislation also establishes separate bargaining units for graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates. Collective bargaining rights for graduate workers in Maryland are long overdue, and AFSCME Council 3 applauds the sponsor for bringing forward this legislation.

Graduate workers in the private sector and numerous public sector jurisdictions already possess the right to collectively bargain, and many of these workers have had this right for decades. More than two decades ago, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that interns, residents, and clinical fellows at a teaching hospital were covered employees entitled to collective bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the NLRB ruled that graduate assistants (teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and research assistants) at New York University were employees within the meaning of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).<sup>2</sup> Less than a decade ago, the NLRB reversed prior precedent issued under the Bush Administration, which had overturned the *New York University* decision.<sup>3</sup> The Board's decision to re-instate prior precedent holding that graduate assistants are employees within the meaning of the NLRA was based on the Board's finding that statutory coverage under the Act was permitted where the evidence in the case established that the graduate assistants fell within the plain meaning of "employee" under the Act, possessed a common law employment relationship with the University, and was supported by the policies of the NLRA, which encourages the practice of collective bargaining and "to protect[ ] the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing."<sup>4</sup> The Board noted that the existence of an additional relationship, e.g. an academic relationship, did not preclude the NLRA from applying to graduate assistants.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Boston Medical Center*, 330 NLRB 152 (1999).

<sup>2</sup> *New York University*, 332 NLRB 1205 (2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Columbia University*, 364 NLRB No. 90 (2016).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 6.

Similarly, numerous public sector jurisdictions across the country recognize the freedom to collectively bargain for graduate assistants.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 56 years ago, the New York State Public Employment Relations Board recognized a union to act as the exclusive representative for various graduate student assistants at the City University of New York.<sup>7</sup> Graduate student workers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison established the first collective bargaining agreement for graduate teaching assistants in the U.S. in 1970.<sup>8</sup> Closely thereafter, graduate student workers in New Jersey at Rutgers University reached their first collective bargaining agreement in 1972.<sup>9</sup> In short, there is a long history of collective bargaining among graduate student workers at public institutions of higher education across the United States.

Here in Maryland, more than sixty percent of graduate workers at the University of Maryland have signed authorization cards to join the United Auto Workers. Upon enactment of the bill, more than 4,000 workers would be able to join a union and have the freedom to collectively bargain. The graduate workers at the University of Maryland have asked the University for voluntary recognition in November 2024, yet the University refused. The legislature has the opportunity to show they are on the side of workers and the labor movement by passing this legislation.

**We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 166.**

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<sup>6</sup> See, William Herbert and Jacob Apkarian, *Everything Passes, Everything Changes: Unionization and Collective Bargaining in Higher Education*, 21 *Perspectives On Work* 30, 31-32 (2017), [https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/ncscbhep/assets/files/LERA%20Herbert\\_Apkarian\\_POW\\_HigherEd\\_2017.pdf](https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/ncscbhep/assets/files/LERA%20Herbert_Apkarian_POW_HigherEd_2017.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> *Board of Higher Education of the City of New York*, 2 PERB ¶ 3000, 1969 WL 189424 (NY PERB 1969). See also, *Board of Higher Education of the City of New York*, 2 PERB ¶ 3056, 1968 WL 179832 (NY PERB 1968).

<sup>8</sup> *Agreement between the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Teaching Assistants Association (TAA)*, Apr. 1970 – Sept. 1971, <https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/ncscbhep/assets/files/TAA%20Agreement.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Rutgers AAUP-AFT, *Who We Are: Our History*, <https://rutgersaaup.org/our-history/>.



# **SEIU Local 500 Testimony on SB 166 - 2025.pdf**

Uploaded by: Christopher Cano

Position: FAV



Testimony - SB 166, State Personnel - Collective Bargaining -  
Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates  
Favorable

Senate Finance Committee

January 30, 2025

Christopher C. Cano, MPA

Director of Political & Legislative Affairs on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

As a union of over 23,000 workers that represent faculty and staff at various universities and colleges throughout the DMV, we have seen first hand how collective bargaining rights change a workforce for the better. Over the past several years new bargaining units have developed at some of our most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the region. Many times the grievances around working conditions, internal processes, and shared governance are echoed from school to school. The issues we see in academic workforces are systemic in this nation. Too often, the idea of running colleges and universities like a business has resulted in attempting to squeeze faculty & staff for maximum efforts with minimal compensation. Dissent and dissatisfaction are met with hostility and hesitancy rather than self-reflection. Shared governance is decied as a sham process to rubber stamp unilateral decisions by administrations.

And, yet, once workers have unionized and negotiated contracts, morale improves. Co-governance of the institution is realized in a meaningful way that respects the value of every worker. Collective bargaining rights, union jobs with living wages, and making Maryland one of the best places to work in this nation has long been a priority of many of you for years. However, year after year, public sector workers in this state have had to come before this body piecemeal to be granted the right to collectively bargain. And, once again the graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates come before the Maryland General Assembly seeking to be treated as any other employee of our institutions of higher learning.

In August of last year, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) reaffirmed that graduate students are statutory employees under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in *RAND v. PRGS ORGANIZES-UAW*.

Key Takeaways from this case include:

- Receiving academic credit for work performed does not preclude a finding that students are employees under the NLRA.
- Conducting research for pedagogical purposes does not preclude a finding that students are employees under the NLRA.
- Failure to advance a key business operation does not preclude a finding that students are employees.
- A common-law employment relationship merely requires compensation in exchange for services, not compensation for “valuable” or “important” services.

These developments in labor relations all point to something Maryland has been missing, graduate students and postdoctoral students are public employees who deserve the same rights as other public employees, chief of those being collective bargaining rights.

Our governor Wes Moore has often spoken that no Marylander should be left behind. Let this be the year the members of this committee and the general assembly make that a reality for graduate and postdoctoral workers in the University System of Maryland. I ask you to be bold, to move democracy forward. I ask you to support SB 166 and grant collective bargaining rights to grad students at our state universities.

Thank you,

Christopher C. Cano, MPA  
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs  
SEIU Local 500



# **SB166\_ColinMcCarthy\_FAV**

Uploaded by: Colin McCarthy

Position: FAV

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.

# **SB 166 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining -**

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



# MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Balto. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

*President*

**Donna S. Edwards**

*Secretary-Treasurer*

**Gerald W. Jackson**

## **SB 166 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates**

**Senate Finance Committee**

**January 30, 2025**

### **SUPPORT**

**Donna S. Edwards**

**President**

**Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 166. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments on granting collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

SB 166 is enabling legislation allowing graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at the University System of Maryland (USM) to exercise their rights to organize and vote for or against a union. The only obstacle between these workers and the same rights granted to thousands of their peers is Maryland's prohibitive law.

Collective bargaining for postdoctoral associates and graduate assistants is not new. Across the country, thousands of academic employees have formed unions. At least a hundred higher education facilities, from Ivy League universities like Yale and Harvard to large and small private colleges like Johns Hopkins University and Goucher College have collective bargaining agreements with their faculty and graduate workers. In 2021, Maryland expanded unionization rights to community colleges across the state. As of today, there are 9 different higher education institutions with unionized faculty or part-time faculty in Maryland and that number will only grow over the next few years.<sup>1</sup>

Graduate worker unions already exist at all of the universities within the Big-Ten Athletic Conference, which now has 18 schools, with the exception of the University System of Maryland and the Ohio State University which still prohibit graduate collective bargaining by law.<sup>2</sup> These schools greatly benefit from unionization by attracting and retaining top talent across the board.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1.

Graduate assistants are workers; they teach, assist with research, and alleviate administrative work—all of which are essential to a university's mission, function, and financial viability. By their own testimony, UMS schools widely recognized how essential graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates are to the university's ability to secure millions of dollars in research funding and supporting ongoing research initiatives. The common law definition of employment is work which “generally requires that the employer have the right to control the employee's work, and that that work be performed in exchange for compensation.”<sup>3</sup> No amount of muddying the waters can ignore the fact that federal labor law, as first ruled by the National Labor Relations Board in 2016<sup>4</sup>, then reaffirmed by the Biden NLRB in 2021<sup>5</sup> and again in 2023<sup>6</sup>, has emphatically decided that graduate assistants are workers.

The NLRB already dismissed arguments by universities that graduate assistants, “are primarily students and have a primarily educational, not economic, relationship with their university.” stating, “We disagree. The Board has the statutory authority to treat student assistants as statutory employees, where they perform work, at the direction of the university, for which they are compensated. Statutory coverage [of the NLRA] is permitted by virtue of an employment relationship; it is not foreclosed by the existence of some other, additional relationship that the Act does not reach.” Since then, the NLRB has gone even further in promoting higher education labor rights, ruling at the regional level that certain student-athletes at private universities have an employee relationship and collective bargaining rights.<sup>7</sup> There is nothing in federal law that prohibits graduate assistants, or any other higher education workers for that matter, from forming unions. This is especially true for higher education workers in the public sector who only need enabling language from their state or locality.

The “meet and confer” process, a USM-led compromise in 2012 to stonewall collective bargaining efforts, has failed. Shared governance, co-governance, and faculty senates are not substitutes for legal rights as workers and are vaguely shared. As Morgan State provided in their testimony, its representative body called the University Council provides for a participatory system of governance in order to provide the University community an opportunity for involvement, communication, and accountability in all major decisions. The University Council, which has 37 members, 27 of which are faculty, seven are staff, two undergraduate students and one graduate student, serve as the University's official governance structure.

More than 60% of graduate workers at UMS have signed authorization cards to join UAW—the only way for university workers to collectively and effectively work with higher education institutions to improve working conditions is by having the freedom to form and join a union of their choice. The legislature must stand aside to allow graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates to unionize. We urge a favorable report on SB 166.

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<sup>3</sup> *Trustees of Dartmouth College*. Case 01-RC-325633. NLRB. (2023)

<sup>4</sup> *Columbia University*, 364 NLRB No. 90 (2016)

<sup>5</sup> Danielle Doublas-Gabriel. “Labor board withdraws rule to quash graduate students' right to organize as employees.” *Washington Post*. March 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Bauer-Wolf. “NLRB: Duke University doctoral students can vote to unionize.” *Higher Ed Dive*. July 13, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> *Trustees of Dartmouth College*. Case 01-RC-325633. NLRB. (2023)

## Appendix 1: Comparison of Graduate Labor Bargaining Rights in the Big Ten Conference

Big Ten University	Graduate Assistant Union Name	Union Recognition Status	Note
University of Michigan	Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), AFT Local 3551	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 1975.
Michigan State University	Graduate Employees Union (GEU), AFT Local 6196	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 2001.
Rutgers University–New Brunswick	Rutgers AAUP, AFT	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 1972.
University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign	Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), AFT/IFT Local 6300	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 2003.
University of Iowa	Campaign to Organize Graduate Students (COGS), UE Local 896	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 1996.
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	University of Minnesota Graduate Labor Union (UMN-GLU), UE Local 1105	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 2023. They voted 2487 to 70 in favor of unionization.
Northwestern University	Northwestern University Graduate Workers (NUGW), UE Local 1122	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 2023. They voted 1644 to 114 in favor of unionization.
University of Oregon	University of Oregon Student Workers Union (UOSW)	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 1976.
University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)	University of California System, UAW Local 4811	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 1999, 2008, 2019, and 2021.
University of Southern California (USC)	Graduate Student Workers Organizing Committee (GSWOC-UAW USC)	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 2023. They voted 1599 to 122 in favor of unionization.
University of Washington	UAW Local 4121	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 2004.
University of Wisconsin–Madison	Teaching Assistants' Association (TAA), AFT Local 3220	Already recognized & bargaining.	Graduate workers have been unionized since 1969.
University of Nebraska–Lincoln	"Unionize UNL"	Currently organizing and have the right to collectively bargain by law.	Holding regular meetings and rallies to build support among graduate workers.
Purdue University	Graduate Rights and Our Wellbeing (GROW)	Currently organizing and have the right to collectively bargain by law.	Holding regular meetings and rallies to build support among graduate workers.
Indiana University Bloomington	Indiana Grad Workers Coalition, UE	Currently organizing and have the right to collectively bargain by law.	Already delivered 1300 cards (more than majority) to the University President and are asking for an election.
Pennsylvania State University	Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE)	Currently organizing and have the right to collectively bargain by law.	On February 9, 2018, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board ruled that graduate employees are public employees.
University of Maryland, College Park	Graduate Labor United (GLU), UAW	Denied the right to collectively bargain by law.	More than 60% of graduate workers have signed authorization cards as of Nov. 2024.
Ohio State University	No Current Campaign	Denied the right to collectively bargain by law.	Ohio Revised Code Chapter 4117.01 (c)(11) prohibits graduate assistant unionization.

## Appendix 2: The State of Faculty & Part Time Faculty Collective Bargaining in Maryland’s Higher Education Institutions<sup>8</sup>

<b>Maryland University</b>	<b>Faculty Union Name</b>	<b>Part-Time Faculty Union Name</b>
<b>Anne Arundel Community College</b>	SEIU	SEIU 500
<b>Frederick Community College</b>	AFT-MD	AFT-MD
<b>Goucher College</b>	SEIU 500	SEIU 500
<b>Harford Community College</b>	MSEA	MSEA
<b>Howard Community College</b>	AFT-MD	SEIU
<b>Maryland Institute College of Art</b>	SEIU 500	SEIU 500
<b>McDaniel College</b>	SEIU 500	SEIU 500
<b>Montgomery College</b>	AFT-MD	SEIU 500
<b>Wor-Wic Community College</b>	MSEA	MSEA

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<sup>8</sup> We are aware of workers at other community colleges that are currently signing cards to form and join unions in the coming year.

**SB 166 USMSC 2025 (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Jaden Farris

Position: FAV





**BILL:** SB 166 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, and Environment

**DATE:** January 30, 2025

**POSITION:** FAVORABLE

**CONTACT:** Jaden Farris, Director of Government Relations | [jadenfarris@umbc.edu](mailto:jadenfarris@umbc.edu)

The University System of Maryland Student Councils(USMSC) represents over 170,000 undergraduate and graduate students across the University System of Maryland's 12 institutions and 3 regional higher education centers. As such, we are in full support of Senate Bill 166 and its respective crossfile.

Graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates are important members of our academic communities. They facilitate and support the teaching of undergraduate students, drive groundbreaking research, and contribute to the overall success of our institutions. Despite their essential roles, many face significant challenges, including inadequate pay, insufficient benefits, lack of job security, and limited avenues to address workplace concerns.

For these reasons, the University System of Maryland Student Council respectfully requests a **favorable report**.

Thank you.



# **SB0166 Testimony - Lucker.pdf**

Uploaded by: Joshua Lucker

Position: FAV

Members of the Committee,

My name is Joshua Lucker. I am a 5th year PhD Candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. I have provided written testimony twice in the past but wish to give oral testimony for this bill. The University System of Maryland and other parties not in favor of this bill will tell you that everything is well in the University System of Maryland, and that collective bargaining is not worth the trouble. I am here **as a member of GLU, a member of the GSG, a member of GAAC** (the Meet and Confer process at the University of Maryland), and most importantly as myself, **that this is unfortunately not the case.**

All three graduate student organizations that I have mentioned have come out in support of this bill. This has not just been this past year, but they have all been in favor for a long while (many even pre-pandemic)! Over the past year, GLU has increased its union card count from around 50% support to OVER 70% support. **It is apparent that graduate students, at least at my university, WANT this bill to pass, and in many cases NEED this bill to pass!!** This bill is crucial to the proper function of graduate assistantships, especially Teaching Assistantships (TAs), as well as the mental health of ALL graduate assistants.

I joined GAAC last year in January (a bit over a year ago). I was a junior member last spring, where GAAC had around 15 or so members, including graduate students from across campus along with the Dean of the Graduate School (Dean Roth), the Provost (Provost Rice), and the Vice President of Administrative Affairs. We started with about 12 graduate students at the start of the spring semester and ended with 4 active members by the end of the spring semester. These 4 members have been trying to increase involvement while navigating the world of higher-level administration. It is important to note that only one member was NOT a new member that spring semester. We have been trying and have not given up hope on GAAC, but **with four graduate students along with Dean Roth and Provost Rice, this is not enough students to fix the concerns of thousands of graduate assistants.** It is apparent that the Meet and Confer process is unfortunately not balanced in our favor. **A union would provide an equitable place at the table for us graduate assistants.**

The story of how I got involved in all of these organizations is unfortunately a rough one. I started as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry my first year. **I was told that I had to grade 80 lab reports, hold 2-4 hours of office hours per week in which I had as many as 30, or even 50, people in my Zoom room. I also answered emails for students, answered discussion boards for students, and went to weekly TA meetings where we discussed how to manage 500+ students for 10 TAs, many of whom were undergraduate students and so the graduate students picked up most of the work.** There was **no clear direction** from the department or instructors, and I had **absolutely no say as to my working conditions.** I expressed **deteriorating mental health** that has persisted to this day as a result, and I was on the verge of weekly mental breakdowns. Instead of trying to work with me to see how they could help, the chemistry department **let me go unexpectedly the following year.**

I have been fortunate to find a TAs in other departments. Unfortunately, my troubles did not end there! Recently, I have had multiple issues with health insurance and HR at the university. In the Fall of 2023, **I switched from Student Health Insurance to Employee Health insurance that summer**

**to start that August.** At least, I thought I had and this was confirmed by the university. However, in Mid-October when I contacted the university due to issues related to this, **they said that I would not get health insurance that fall at all. BUT that I could pay full price for the Student Health insurance for that semester that would now only encompass two months!** I have had more issues related to health insurance due to switching departments every semester for my TAs, and instead of working with me, **HR has told me to never contact them about any issue** (no, I am not exaggerating). I am fortunate that the Division of Student Affairs at my university has graciously agreed to take over for all HR and employee matters for me.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, it is an unfortunate fact that the Meet and Confer Process is deteriorating at the University of Maryland. **I have not given up hope for this, and we are working with Dean Roth who has fortunately been relatively responsive in this matter!** However, the issues at the university continue to deteriorate, especially for me given my personal issues above (**none of which has been properly resolved**). I continue to face issues to this day. **I have been fortunate enough to find faculty and administration to listen to my concerns and try to help me navigate this! But the University System of Maryland now can and has all ability to ignore our concerns and important matters.** Collective bargaining rights would bring these pertinent issues directly to the administration in a collaborative setting and offer **a place for us at the table to collegiately resolve the concerns of mine and other graduate students.** Rather than being seen as lesser, we can be seen as what we are; colleagues and graduate student workers.

I hope this helps the committee understand our situation, and I submit this testimony in **STRONG FAVORABLE SUPPORT** of this bill. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out at my email: **jlucker1@umd.edu.**

**Joshua Lucker**

5<sup>th</sup> Year PhD Student, Biophysics Program

Graduate Assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park

**sb166- labor rights, state system- FIN 1-30-2025.p**

Uploaded by: Lee Hudson

Position: FAV



**Delaware-Maryland Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

Testimony Prepared for the  
**Finance Committee**  
on  
**Senate Bill 166**  
January 30, 2025  
Position: **Favorable**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to support the dignity of human effort by acknowledging the human right to organize and bargain collectively. I am Lee Hudson, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are a faith community with three judicatories in every part of our State.

Our community supports the human rights of workers, to include a right to organize and bargain collectively in the interest of fair wages and safe and just work conditions.

A 2017 message among us concerning human rights as principle and instrument, affirmed a 1999 ELCA statement about justice in the *oikos*, the economy. Among the pillars of economic justice is, *(t)he principle of participation (meaning) all are entitled to be heard and to have their interests considered when decisions are made.* Support for the right to organize and bargain is in the written record of the predecessor bodies of our church going back at least to the 1930s; it is in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and it has been law in the United States since 1935.

For those reasons we support the right of workers to organize and bargain when that right is under public discussion; and we support **Senate Bill 166**. We ask your favorable report.

Lee Hudson

# **GLUUAW SB 166 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lydia Majure

Position: FAV

## **University of Maryland Graduate Labor Union - UAW Written Testimonies in Support of the Higher Education Collective Bargaining bill SB 166**

*Submitted by GLU-UAW on behalf of the authors below.*

Here we have compiled testimony from GLU and GLU allies in support of collective bargaining for graduate workers in the University System of Maryland. The following is testimony from just a small number of the more than 2,500 graduate workers who have signed authorization cards to form a union with UAW.

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I am a second year PhD student studying Biophysics at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are only promised one year of guaranteed funding for a degree that can take up to seven years. Furthermore, because biophysics is not a department, we lack undergraduate TA opportunities and students whose advisors cannot fund them must find new TA appointments every semester. This has led to situations where students must pay tuition (without income), or take breaks from their studies—which is especially disruptive to international students on F-1 visas. Having collective bargaining rights would enable graduate students to have a say in our own working conditions and would materially impact the lives of myself and my peers. With a recognized union, we could bargain for increased job security and reduce the stress and precarity of graduate work.

Anjali Verma

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As a fourth year Biophysics PhD student, I have been asked to assist on a number of grant applications and reports with very tight deadlines in addition to my typical workload. Given that graduate assistants currently do not have clear legally-enforceable contracts, our advisors can request that graduate assistants perform any amount of auxiliary work that they desire. Without a clear contract, we will continue to have arbitrary tasks assigned to us with no overtime compensation if they require additional time to complete. A supermajority of graduate assistants are in agreement with this and other demands that can be addressed with collective bargaining. It is essential that we are explicitly granted collective bargaining rights considering that the University of Maryland refused to voluntarily recognize our union.

Anna Emenheiser

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As a second year Entomology Masters student, I've been invited by the university to represent the Entomology department to the Dean of the College of Computer, Math, and Natural Sciences (CMNS), and to represent CMNS to the Provost of the university. In these toothless councils, every single request we have made has been rejected. A supermajority of graduate workers shares my opinion that collective bargaining is the only way for graduate workers to effectively advocate for themselves.



Jenan El-Hifnawi

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In my program, graduates apply into labs on campus, or at affiliated institutions, such as the NIH. Despite fulfilling the exact same academic requirements and doing the same lab work, only some of us have the right to negotiate our working conditions. The NIH recognizes that their graduate fellows are workers, who perform essential labor in collecting, writing up, and presenting research, and that without their labor, they would not be able to produce world-class clinical research. On the other hand, UMD refuses to recognize graduates as workers despite the fact that UMD's academic status as a premiere learning and research institution in the nation is not possible without the labor of grads who teach classes and perform research. The lack of collective bargaining rights for UMD grads means that there are rampant workplace issues on campus that have gone unaddressed for decades - unliveable wages, ineffective grievance procedures, and no parental leave policy, to name a few. As my program's Graduate Student Government (GSG) representative for the past three years, I can unequivocally say that the current shared governance system is not designed to solve labor issues for grad workers. We have tried time and time again to move administrators on these issues, and have been met time and time again with excuses, deflection, or been flat out ignored. A supermajority of grad workers, which include representatives from every single graduate program offered at the College Park campus, support collective bargaining and asked that UMD voluntarily recognize our union this fall. Even graduate shared governance bodies, which UMD currently claims is an effective way to address graduate labor issues, support collective bargaining. GSG has unanimously approved legislation this year advocating for voluntary recognition of our union, in addition to years of legislation in the past supporting collective bargaining rights at the legislative level. The Graduate Assistant Advisory Council has also released a statement supporting collective bargaining. Despite this, UMD still refused to voluntarily recognize our union. Collective bargaining rights for grad workers must be enshrined in state law so that the teachers and researchers who do essential work at our state universities are able to democratically and effectively negotiate for better working conditions.

Rose Ying

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I am a 5th year PhD student at the University of Maryland in the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Science, working on solutions to sea level rise and climate change. It's work that I love and work that is critical for the future of our state. It's work that I'd like to be fairly treated while doing. And I am not alone. A supermajority of my colleagues at UMD College Park have signed union authorization cards with the United Auto Workers. We've held rallies and called on the USM Board of Regions to recognize our Union. Now, we're turning to the legislature, to give us the same rights Graduate Assistants across the country already enjoy, including at peer Big 10 institutions, like Rutgers. Here in our own state private Universities, like Johns Hopkins already have a graduate union and continue to achieve excellence in research and teaching. I even fear that the lack of collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants at UMD could have a deleterious brain drain effect on our state. I've heard from highly qualified prospective graduates that the lack of a union at UMD is a serious concern when deciding where to attend graduate school. There's a simple

solution: pass this bill. Grant us collective bargaining rights. And then watch the University of Maryland prosper.

Henry Hausmann

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I am a second year physics PhD student in the physics department at UMD. We are guaranteed funding for only two years, when our degree could take up to a decade to earn. Even that funding guarantee becomes less than guaranteed past the first year of the program, especially for students working in research areas that are more theory-oriented. And the funding we get is not enough. Even though we are among the better paid departments on campus, I still know many students who are one minor emergency from financial ruin or have to live in suboptimal conditions to afford housing. And with the large number of international students in our department, I do not see a significant effort to assist them with visa-related issues and costs coming from visa problems. Most resources that are supposed to be available to graduate workers on campus are either grossly understaffed or have so many layers of bureaucracy that they are practically useless. Often these layers of bureaucracy create problems that are then next to impossible to resolve. I firmly believe that gaining our collective bargaining rights would allow us to remedy all these problems and more. And now a supermajority of the graduate workers at UMD agree with me. So it's time for the people who make the largest research university in the capital region thrive have the working conditions and compensation they deserve.

Greg Babić

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I am a second-year PhD student in the Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership department at UMD. My entire professional career has been dedicated to education. After working as a public school teacher for 11 years in Washington, DC, I transitioned to my role as a doctoral student so I could understand how best to support preservice teachers to organize in coalition with the students and families they will serve. Being an instructor for two courses in the College of Education has reignited my passion for teaching, and the connections I have made with my students represent my lifelong commitment to service. Below are some of the responses I have received on anonymous end-of-term course surveys:

- “[T]his course has been one of my favorite classes I have taken at UMD. Cody is so personable and wants to see you succeed. I have never had a teacher care about the student's success in college so far. I have learned so much and will take everything I learned with me throughout life.”
- “The discussions we engaged in helped me understand not only more about the concepts but how to apply them. I love the discussion questions offered because I always think about what I've read from a new perspective. Additionally, we're able to switch the conversation from just one set point. For example if we disagree we can explain why and even offer a different perspective. The room for joy was a breath of fresh air that many of my classes lacked. Furthermore, the assignments all directly related to what we were learning especially

the content reflections. The feedback was very specific and the fast grading relieved my anxiety throughout the semester. I'd take this class all over again even if it wasn't required. I strongly believe many of my skills as a future educator will come from this class, even if it's not directly related to critical literacy."

- "I appreciated how he took the time to understand that we are students with lives outside of school and his course. His awareness of that allowed him to create a comfortable and flexible environment where we felt happy to come to class rather than obligated to attend. He encouraged a level of discussion that the class collectively agreed on. For example, when we felt that small group discussions would be more beneficial for the day, he respected that and adjusted to what we asked. Overall, he fostered a very welcoming and supportive space for his students. Even I, someone who usually feels too anxious to share their thoughts aloud, felt much more comfortable participating in this class because of the environment he created."

These are three anecdotes from dozens more I could have selected. I have deep respect and care for my students and my work at UMD. I have spent countless hours writing recommendations, offering professional and personal advice, and helping them manage mental health and family crises. However, my capacity to engage in this work diminishes daily because my stipend of \$27,486 does not cover my living expenses. I have had to access the campus pantry every week and limit my food consumption to save money I don't have. I have skipped medical appointments and delayed procedures because I am constantly worried about costs. Graduate workers across the university perform essential work without which the university would cease functioning. As the Graduate Labor Union (GLU), we have been advocating for fair living and working conditions, proactively seeking out opportunities to partner with the university via the collective bargaining process. The university has refused to listen to our concerns, has refused to engage in good faith, and has refused to voluntarily recognize our union despite GLU having supermajority support from graduate assistants.

On its website, the UMD Division of Research defines justice in this way, "Reform existing systems, structures, and policies based in and perpetuating inequity while developing systems, structures, and policies that create equitable opportunity and resource distribution." How can the university seriously commit to this mission when it continues to silence graduate students and dehumanize us through its continued disrespect for our well-being and livelihood? I request that the Maryland legislature support and pass the bill providing collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants. Not only would you be supporting me and my colleagues at the university, but you would also be supporting the thousands of future Maryland teachers with whom I hope to work for the rest of my career.

Cody Norton

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I am a fourth year PhD candidate in the Biological Sciences program. I do work to help enumerate the ways in which Mycobacterium tuberculosis causes inflammation. Tuberculosis is an ancient disease that continues to cause a significant public health burden across the world. My work is important and vital to public health across the world. Recently, I had to move out of my apartment

close to campus and into my parents' home over an hour away due to high rent prices and an extremely low graduate stipend. This has affected every single part of my work. I spend **hours** of additional time commuting to and from campus when this time could be used more productively for myself, and my research. I am not alone. My story is not unique amongst my cohort, and others in my department and across the university. In addition, as a graduate worker our responsibilities and rights are not recorded anywhere leading to a vast range in treatment that depends on the generosity of your PI. Collective bargaining rights could provide a more fair and equitable workplace and reduce some of the additional burdens we, as grad workers, often take on in order to make our contributions to academia possible.

Akshaya Ganesh

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I am a fourth year Ph.D. student in the Biological Sciences program at UMD. As a graduate worker, I have chosen to commute 40 minutes to campus to avoid the expensive, cockroach and mice infected buildings in College Park. Last year, I made ~\$32,000 after taxes which all went towards living expenses, health insurance, car maintenance, and student fees. With this financial burden, I am living paycheck to paycheck, yet somehow, I am doing very well compared to many of my fellow graduate workers. I know graduate workers that picked up additional jobs to cover living expenses, if they can find the time. Some have taken off a year or more from their studies to work so they can pay for their education. Other graduate workers that are international students have been forced to suffer an abusive advisor to maintain their visa status. We have made these realities known to the university's administration, and each time we have been ignored. The university claims it values and depends on the work of its students, yet has turned a blind eye to the conditions that impact their work and livelihood. After a supermajority of graduate workers showed support for collective bargaining, we asked the university to voluntarily recognize our union and they refused. To improve the working conditions of graduate workers, I am requesting the passing of this bill to grant collective bargaining rights. With collective bargaining rights, the university can no longer ignore our efforts to improve the working conditions and lives of graduate workers.

Spencer Lewis

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I am a second year PhD student in Computer Science. The computer science PhD program at UMD runs on a 9.5-month assistantship where we get paid ~\$30,000 (pre-taxes and deductions) as either a research assistant or, in my case, a teacher assistant. There are semesters when I am unable to allocate time to my research and thesis work because I am already overloaded with TA responsibilities and classwork. Fortunately, my advisor has enough funding to pay for summer assistantships, meaning that I am able to get an additional \$16,000 during the summer as a research assistant where I develop computational tools that perform analyses on antimicrobial resistance and mobile genetic elements, two topics that are relevant to the study of disease evolution and to our public health.

Regrettably, that isn't the case for many of my peers. Because the cost of living is too high in the DC area, they are forced to take on a paid internship over the summer, meaning they either get further behind on research, or they work sleepless nights to stay on track. On top of that, many of those that have to take on an internship are on a student visa, meaning that they are not allowed to do work outside the university without their advisor's and UMD's approval. As a result, they have to register for an internship course which requires them to pay thousands of dollars in tuition to the university.

Over 55% of grad workers in the Computer Science department—and over 60% of grad workers throughout campus—have shown their support for unionization. And despite this, UMD admins have denied our demand for voluntary recognition. This is why we have chosen to come directly to the General Assembly to request for the legalization of collective bargaining in Maryland for grad workers.

Nathalie Bonin

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When I started graduate school at Johns Hopkins over a decade ago (2012), my stipend was \$30,000 per year. At that time, nearly all of my stipend went towards living expenses. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>), a graduate student in 2024 would need to earn a stipend of about \$42,000 to have the same buying power, just to account for inflation. Imagine my horror to learn that my graduate colleagues today are earning *as much* or *less* than I did twelve years ago.

Graduate workers are the lifeblood of research and teaching universities. They perform much of the lab work which brings in millions of dollars in grant money to their institutions. They also play a significant role in teaching. While estimates vary by institution, and comprehensive statistics are lacking, graduate students may serve as instructors (including primary instructors) for as much as 20 to 40% of all undergraduate coursework. Graduate students are clearly essential workers for their universities, yet they have neither the recognition, protection, nor remuneration of regular employees. This must change. Please support the bill to grant collective bargaining rights to all graduate workers of this state.

Darya Task

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I'm a first year Computer Science PhD student, and in my department it's clear that there is overwhelming support for the union. Almost everyone I talk to is supportive of the unionization effort, and we have the cards signed to back this up with numbers. Despite this, UMD keeps claiming that unionization is not in our best interests. I don't think this is a decision UMD should be able to make for us, and I think it's essential for graduate workers to be able to self-determine our working conditions through our own organization. I know several people who are experiencing workplace equity issues and their only solution is to go through UMD-run channels that don't have their best interests at heart. Having a union that is actually on our side is extremely important to improving workplace conditions.

Sora Cullen-Baratloo

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I am a 3rd year international PhD student in the Department of Geographical Sciences. I have a 12 month contract, but my contract is renewed on a yearly basis even though it takes on average at least 5 years to attain a PhD in this department. This lack of stability, in concert with a lack of clarity on the mechanisms for dropping PhD students from the program has caused a lot of anxiety for me. Additionally, while I do receive my stipend even over summer, the exorbitant cost of living in the DMV area means that between rent and groceries most of my stipend is used up. When I had a medical emergency last semester, I had to delay care due to financial concerns. I know worries about housing/healthcare/food security are common throughout the department.

Alongside this, being an international student has added another layer of instability. Just last year a student of my department was denied entry and was left unable to complete their PhD program, and there is very little infrastructure in place to protect and support international students in these situations. This is particularly of concern for my department, as the majority of research and teaching assistants of GEOG are not US citizens.

I believe that being able to bargain collectively will make it easier for our voices to be heard. While university administration may have the best of intentions, they cannot truly understand the daily struggles that impact graduate workers. The best way for graduate workers to gain the support and protections that we need is for us to have the bargaining power of a recognized union, which is in line with the will of a supermajority of graduate workers at UMD.

Rahayu Adzhar

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As faculty members, we strongly support the right of graduate assistants to unionize. We are particularly dismayed that administrators claim that the faculty-student relationship would deteriorate if there was a graduate assistant union. To be clear, many faculty members would be delighted to see graduate assistants bargain collectively for higher stipends and better working conditions. Far from damaging our relationship with the graduate students, it would improve that relation because graduate students would be far less stressed and more able to concentrate on their graduate studies. They would not need to take on additional jobs to pay their bills and eat. As faculty members, we ask: If our university pays stipends so small that graduate students need to take on other outside jobs to eat and feed their families, is the university concerned about assistants' special "student status." Or is their main concern the bottom line of the university and its need for cheap labor?

On behalf of faculty members of United Academics of Maryland at UMD (an affiliate of the American Association of University Professors and the American Federation of Teachers).

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My name is Joseph Knisely, and I am a PhD candidate in Atmospheric and Oceanic Science. My research primarily focuses on numerical weather prediction and data processing. I perform research that improves our forecasting of severe weather to save lives and property, working directly with collaborators at NOAA to advance their mission statement as well as the mission statement of this university.

Throughout my time here, I have witnessed brilliant and talented graduate researchers abandoned by both advisors and departments, forced to scramble for secondary work or funding sources while receiving minimal support from their employer, the university. I have seen workers abused and overworked by their superiors, trapped in untenable situations where they must choose between mistreatment or losing their jobs, health insurance, and future career prospects.

I have witnessed fellow workers experience sexual misconduct and assault from colleagues and superiors, and I have seen firsthand the university's callous disregard for their experiences. Through personal experience with the Title IX office, I can state with conviction that this university prioritizes protecting itself from liability over uncovering the truth and providing fair treatment to victims.

I have watched as international workers, who have traveled thousands of miles to join our community, advance our science, and contribute to our academic mission, are treated as disposable and disregarded at the slightest inconvenience to this university.

As invaluable and irreplaceable workers within the university system, graduate workers deserve a voice in our salary and benefits negotiations. We should not face abandonment or abuse from their advisors, departments, and superiors. Victims of sexual assault and misconduct deserve fair treatment and need an advocate in their corner. International workers should be treated as equal members of our university community, not as disposable assets.

A supermajority of graduate workers across this campus have signed union authorization cards explicitly expressing support for the formation of a labor union, and that number continues to grow every day. If this university and state legislature continue to ignore our demands, it is not a question of "if" but "when" we will withhold our labor and bring this university system to a halt. For the sake of the students, workers, professors, and researchers who constitute this university community, make the right decision and grant us collective bargaining rights now.

Joseph Knisely

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Graduate workers are arguably the backbone of any university. In my experience as a second year graduate student studying Geology, I see evidence for this first hand. Whether it's inspiring eager undergraduate students in an introductory geology lab in a way that a professor never could or performing cutting edge research tasks that professionals directly said would never work, myself and my fellow graduate workers play a major role in both the student experience and the research prowess of the University of Maryland. Yet, a majority of graduate students at the University of Maryland and surrounding universities are unsatisfied with their compensation. Whether it's food

insecurity or trouble paying rent every month, graduate workers in Maryland are experiencing a financial stress on top of the stress of obtaining a higher degree that is simply not sustainable. I, personally, could pay my rent every month, living from paycheck to paycheck, but a simple car repair bill saw my wife and I taking on debt and considering a move away from my education. Ultimately, if we want Maryland's public universities to maintain or improve their status as renowned centers of education, their graduate workers must be paid a sustainable wage, and the only way to achieve this goal in a democratic way is to allow them to unionize. With a supermajority already achieved among the graduate student population, all we need to make this goal a reality and set Maryland's higher education system on an upward track in the future is collective bargaining rights. This is why we come to the General Assembly, not because we are simply looking out for our own financial interests, but for the interests of Maryland's Universities and the general public who benefit from a world-class higher education system in the United States.

Zach Vig

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I am a third year PhD student in History. One of the University of Maryland's favorite things to say is that "graduate students are students first." Yet, in the absence of a binding work contract, many of us are forced to work long hours far beyond the 20 hours per week stipulated in unenforceable "Statements of Mutual Expectations." The low pay we receive force many of us to work jobs outside our Graduate Assistantships to make rent in this high cost of living area. Our struggle to make ends meet diverts time away from our studies—the readings we must complete for our coursework and comprehensive exams, the research we perform for our dissertations, and the professional development activities (like conference presentations and publishing) in which we must participate to advance in our field. Collective bargaining rights will allow graduate workers to have a real say in our pay and working conditions as workers, which in turn will improve our learning conditions as students.

Andrea Gutmann Fuentes

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I am an assistant professor in Government and Politics in my third year at the University of Maryland College Park. In that time I have advised about a dozen graduate workers formally and several more informally. In addition, beginning in September of every academic year, I receive about 6-7 emails from prospective students that are interested in pursuing their PhD in Government and Politics. It breaks my heart to admit that each year I struggle to recruit prospective students to UMD, especially when they are considering our peer institutions across the Big10 like Rutgers, Michigan, and Northwestern.

It's not that I believe the graduate training that they will receive in political science is better at these other universities. Our department hosts leading scholars across a range of substantive areas and methodologies. But, unlike several of our peer institutions, our graduate workers at UMD lack the fundamental democratic right to unionize.



For over a decade, peer-reviewed scholarship has demonstrated that unionization for graduate workers has substantial material benefits. Graduate wages and stipends are significantly higher and provide an actual living wage where workers have CB rights. Graduate workers report greater respect for principles of academic freedom where workers have CB rights. Job placements after the phd are positively correlated with higher graduate stipends, and yes unionization is also positively correlated with tenure-track placements after the phd.

I want to be excited about welcoming new graduate workers to the University of Maryland. But I maintain significant reservations when I know our grads could go elsewhere and earn a living wage. You can change that reality by recognizing grad workers right to CB. 2,000+ graduate workers are not wrong.

Marcus Johnson

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I am a first year Masters Student in the School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. In my work as a graduate assistant, I have calculated the precise housing shortages faced in the State of Maryland, and found that these shortages are worst for low income residents of Montgomery and Prince George's county, which is the precise demographic of graduate workers of the university. With this ongoing cost of living and housing crisis, it is imperative that the university better support its students and without a union, this has been shown to be wishful thinking. A collective bargaining agreement would dramatically reduce the burden faced by graduate workers and allow us to fully engage with our work, rather than search for second jobs to make rent and pay for groceries. The power of the legislature to force recognition of our union, supported by over 2,000 of us students, is necessary for the continued quality of our research and a dignified living for our workers.

Cole Shultz

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I am a first year Ph.D. student in the Computer Science department of the College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences. In the less than 6 months I have been here, I have seen many issues in my department and school-wide that union efforts could start to address - including lack of transparency from departments, shortage of RA/GA funding, and housing inequity. We need collective bargaining rights to ensure the quality of life and work for 2000+ graduate students.

Caspar Popova

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Chairmen of the Committee,

My name is Joshua Lucker. I am a 5th year PhD student. I have provided written testimony twice in the past. The University System of Maryland and other parties not in favor of this bill will tell you that everything is well and that collective bargaining is not worth the trouble. I am here as a member of GLU, a member of the GSG, a member of GAAC (the Meet and Confer process at the University of Maryland), and most importantly as myself, that this is unfortunately not the case.

All three graduate student organizations that I have mentioned have come out in support of this bill. This has not been just this year, but they have been in favor for a long while, many even pre-pandemic! Over the past year, GLU has increased its union card count from around 50% support to OVER 70% support. It is apparent that graduate students at this university WANT this bill, and in many cases NEED this bill to pass!! This bill is crucial to the proper function of graduate assistantships, especially Teaching Assistantships, as well as the MENTAL HEALTH of all graduate assistants.

I joined GAAC last year in January (a bit over a year ago). I was a junior member last spring, where GAAC had around 15 or so members, including graduate students from across campus along with the Dean of the Graduate School (Dean Roth), the Provost (Provost Rice), and the Vice President of Administrative Affairs. We started with about 12 graduate students at the start of the spring semester, and ended with 4 active members by the end of the spring semester. These 4 members have been trying to increase involvement while navigating the world of higher level administration. It is important to note that only one member was NOT a new member that spring semester. We have been trying, and I personally have not given up hope, but it is apparent that the Meet and Confer process is unfortunately not balanced in our favor.

The story of how I got involved in all of these organizations is a rough one. I started as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry my first year. I was told that I had to grade 80 lab reports, hold 2-4 hours of office hours per week in which I had as many as 30, or even 50, people in my Zoom room. I also answered emails for students, answered discussion boards for students, and went to weekly TA meetings where we discussed how to manage 500+ students for 10 TAs, many of whom were undergraduate students and so the graduate students picked up most of the work. There was no clear direction from the department or instructors. I expressed my DETERIORATING MENTAL HEALTH the second semester, as I was on the verge of weekly mental breakdowns, and was then let go of my TAship the following year.

I have been fortunate to find a TAship in other departments. Unfortunately, my troubles did not end there! Recently, I have had multiple issues with health insurance and HR at the university. In the Fall of 2023, I switched from Student Health Insurance to Employee Health insurance that summer to start that August. At least, I thought I had and this was confirmed by the university. However, in Mid-October when I contacted the university due to issues related to this, they said that I would not get health insurance that fall AT ALL. BUT that I could pay FULL PRICE for the Student Health insurance for that semester, which would now only encompass two months! I have had more issues related to health insurance due to switching departments every semester for my TAships, and instead of working with me, HR has been so gracious to send me a CEASE AND DESIST, active for ALL OF UHR! I am fortunate that the Division of Student Affairs has graciously agreed to take over for HR and all employee matters for me.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, it is the UNFORTUNATE FACT that the Meet and Confer Process is not working at the University of Maryland. I have not given up hope for this, and we are working with Dean Roth who has been relatively responsive. HOWEVER, the Meet and Confer Process has NOT WORKED, especially for me given my personal issues above, none of which has been properly resolved. I continue to face issues to this day. I have been fortunate enough to find faculty and administration to listen to my concerns and try to help me navigate this! But the university can, and has, all ability to ignore our concerns and important matters. Collective bargaining rights would bring these pertinent issues directly to the administration in a COLLABORATIVE setting, and level the playing field so that we, the Graduate students, can address our concerns as colleagues rather than lesser workers.

I hope this helps the committee understand our situation, and I submit this testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of this bill.

Joshua Lucker

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I am a second-year biology graduate student, and I am fortunate to work at the NIH, where the Fellows Union has successfully secured higher wages—\$10,000 more than what my graduate program offers—and better health insurance. However, my lab mates in the same program are not as fortunate. Many of them are forced to dip into their savings just to cover basic expenses like rent and groceries. While my graduate program has proposed a \$10,000 wage increase this year, this is not the reality for Ph.D. students in other departments, who are left at the mercy of program directors with no guarantee of fair compensation. It is unacceptable that graduate students, who provide essential labor and contribute significantly to the university's research output, are often left to live below the poverty line.

Angela Jiang

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My name is Nicole King and I am an associate professor in the Department of American Studies at UMBC, where I have worked for 18 years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. The state already grants the right of collective bargaining towards nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our four-year institutions. It is clear that this right should be extended to all higher ed workers in Maryland.

When I started as a graduate student working on my Ph.D. in American Studies in 2001 at the University of Maryland, College Park, I taught various undergraduate courses that sustained my department and the university. My stipend was \$12,000 with tuition remission. I had to take out loans to pay my rent and afford to live in the D.C. metro area. Once I saw the overlooked but important work of graduate students and lecturers at UMCP, I joined Graduates, Adjuncts, and Lecturers Organized Labor (GALOL). We were affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers

(AFT) at the time. While teaching and doing research, I learned about organizing and spent many evenings and weekends talking with my fellow graduate students about our right to organize and how it would directly improve our lives. I co-chaired GALOL from 2002 - 2004 and learned more about the real importance for labor organizing and workers rights in higher education across the nation.

In 2008, I was lucky to be hired as an assistant professor at UMBC right after finishing my P.D. but my salary was only \$56,000. As I received tenure, I noticed an extreme compression of wages—new faculty coming in making more than those of us who had been loyal employees for many years. Nothing in our faculty senate addressed these issues. They were addressed on an individual basis or by taking all the time to get another job and retention offers for jobs no one really intended to take—another problem of the lack of voice in our working conditions. This causes USM to lose many excellent workers to other states with unionized faculty.

Finally, as chair of my department from 2015-2022, I saw the economics of how adjunct and contingent faculty make the institutions of higher education work without anything near fair compensation. Furthermore, as co-chair of the Committee on Departments, Programs, and Center with the American Studies Association (ASA), I saw how unionized faculty and graduate students at peer institutions had far better working conditions than non-union workers at USM. If USM wants to compete on a national and a global scale, we must offer the right to organize to staff, faculty, and graduate students.

It is shameful that I've been in this fight for over 20 years and we have not achieved this basic right. It is time to make a change. All state employees deserve the right to collective bargaining and to have a say in our working conditions. The student experience, equity in higher ed, and the quality of our institutions will benefit. This is especially important as other states (and potentially our own one day) are engaged in deeply unfair and conservative battles to dismantle public higher education.

Members of the Committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to promote democracy in our workplaces and public institutions. The right to collective bargaining has long been recognized as not only a fundamental human right, but also as the best method of ensuring that employee voices play a vital role in constructing conditions that govern our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher ed institutions in the nation, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt four-year public higher ed institutions from this path make no sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to this Bill.

Sincerely,  
Nicole King, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor & Acting Chair  
Department of American Studies, UMBC  
[nking@umbc.edu](mailto:nking@umbc.edu)

40th District Resident

1125 Hollins St.  
Baltimore, MD 21223

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I am a 5th year PhD student in physics at the University of Maryland. I am writing in strong support of our bill, which would grant us the collective bargaining rights afforded to every other state employee and allow us the democratic choice to unionize.

I have international student friends who have not seen their families since starting their PhD 5 years ago due to fears about their visa renewal. Take a moment to imagine being forced to choose between your family or your job. The University of Maryland has provided no support to graduate students stranded at the border despite the additional international student fee of \$250 a year. A union would be the first step to abolishing this unfair fee as well as providing the legal and financial support to these students with visa issues, a problem that will become more and more common with the current administration.

I and many other students I know have experienced sexual harassment or assault by colleagues or advisors. Few resources are provided to students going through the Title IX investigation process. The Graduate Legal Aid Office is run on a volunteer basis by personnel who are untrained in Title IX procedures, and graduate students do not have the means to afford legal aid, even on a heavily discounted basis. The procedures I've witnessed first or secondhand have been needlessly stressful to victims, causing delays in our research and teaching. The support of a union would help us ensure timely and fair resolution to our cases while providing trained support to advocate for our interests during such procedures.

The issue of collective bargaining for graduate workers is not only crucial but extremely urgent given the erosion of both worker and student rights. I urge the members of the committee to report on this bill favorably.

Emily Jiang

# **20250128\_NIHFU Collective Bargaining Testimonials.**

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Position: FAV

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. Moreso, 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.

# **SB 166 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining -**

Uploaded by: Michael McMillan

Position: FAV

# Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1300

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## SB 166 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

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

ATU Local 1300 represents over 3,000 transit workers at the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). This includes bus operators, bus mechanics, rail operators, rail maintenance workers, and more. Our members keep Maryland moving every day.

The right to organize and form unions is essential to a functioning democracy. It is recognized by Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating plainly, “Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”

The graduate and postgraduate workers have waited far too long to use their rights. Thousands of workers are waiting on the General Assembly to grant them a right that they should not have to ask for. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.



# **Testimony in support of SB0166 - State Personnel -**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0166\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

01/30/2025

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB0166 – FAVORABLE**

State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

**TO:** Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Finance Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard K. Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0166, State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates

This bill will let persons working in Maryland higher education facilities exercise the right to unionize by providing collective bargaining rights to certain graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at a system institution, Morgan State University, or St Mary's College of Maryland. It will also permit establishing separate collective bargaining units for the graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates.

Unions help the Department of Labor fulfill its mission to protect the health, safety, wages and retirement security of working Americans. Workers represented by unions feel safer voicing concerns about workplace safety and health, wage theft and other violations of worker protections. Unions help enforce workers' legal rights. Supporting workers as they try to form unions helps the department's ability to carry out its mission. As our Comptroller has stated, "we all do better when we all do better". By providing these rights we can make the moral statement that how we treat workers in Maryland makes that "do better" not just a goal, but a right and a fact.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report and pass SB#0166.**

**SB166\_MSEA\_Zwerling\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Samantha Zwerling

Position: FAV

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

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

**Samantha Zwerling**  
**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.**

<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>.

# **SB 166. HigherEd-GradsCollective Bargaining.pdf**

Uploaded by: Todd Reynolds

Position: FAV

**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.



# **Bill Response - SB0166.pdf**

Uploaded by: David Wilson

Position: UNF



*Office of the President*

**Morgan State University Testimony  
Dr. David K. Wilson, President**

**Senate Bill 0166 (Senator Kramer)**

State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral  
Associates

*Finance Committee*

**January 30, 2025**

**Unfavorable**

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Finance Committee. We, at Morgan, thank you for the opportunity to share our position on Senate Bill 0166. The summary of the Bill states the following: *Providing collective bargaining rights to certain graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates at a system institution, Morgan State University, or St Mary's College of Maryland; and establishing separate collective bargaining units for the graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates.*

I submit these comments based on my extensive experience in higher education, including involvement I've had in labor relations and the collective bargaining process, and on behalf of Morgan State University ("Morgan State" or the "University"), where I have proudly served as President since July 1, 2010. I would like to highlight concerns regarding potential disruption to collaborative decision-making processes already in place and the potential negative impact on institutional sustainability, the shift of focus from excellence in teaching, intensive research, and effective public service and community engagement, should this bill pass.

Morgan State University utilizes several entities, including its representative body called the University Council, to provide for a participatory system of governance in order to provide the University community an opportunity for involvement, communication, and accountability in all major decisions. The University Council, which has 37 members (27 faculty, 7 staff, 2 undergraduate students, 1 graduate student) serves as the University's official governance structure involving the administration, faculty, professional administrative staff, classified employees, graduate students, and the undergraduate student body in the ongoing operation of the University. In particular, three faculty members come from each of the nine academic colleges and schools at the University. For academic colleges and schools with graduate programs, at least one of the three representatives shall be a member of the graduate faculty. Two members of the Council are from the University's classified employees. In terms of responsibility, the University Council serves as an advisory body to the president of the University, reviews all proposed policies, and ultimately gives the University's president feedback on such policies. As president,

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I take this feedback very seriously and rarely, if ever, have I, in my fifteen years as president, advanced any significant policy to the Morgan State University Board of Regents for action without reaching consensus with the Council. Please also understand that the University Council may also, on its own initiative, make recommendations to me for mine and the Board of Regents consideration with respect to any matter of university-wide significance and impact.

In essence, the University Council serves a valued role in providing all members of the University's community a part in shared governance. It has been my experience in higher ed institutions with collective bargaining within its academic ranks that it has led to slower progress and hindered implementation of initiatives which effectively address the concerns of multiple stakeholders, as already accomplished by the University Council.

Further, a collective bargaining environment can create an extremely adversarial relationship between graduate assistants, and postdoctoral associates, creating the possibility that collective bargaining agreements and the nature of the relationship may prioritize union interests over collaborative solutions, thereby impacting curricular development and alignment with market needs, and resource allocation when resources are very limited, leading to a tense learning environment for students. This legislation would likely lead to the promulgation of union rules for graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates which restrict the autonomy they currently enjoy through course design, pedagogy, and assessment. Similarly, the immense amount of time that the collective bargaining process requires would surely impact their commitment to these aspects of their academic lives.

Enactment of this bill would likely also result in the University's need to hire a significant number of additional personnel to manage relations with additional bargaining units. These new employees would entail a significant added expense to the University at a time when our operating budget is being reduced by over \$12 million annually. Moreover, these new employees, along with incumbent employees, would require substantial training and be tasked with additional responsibilities to remain in compliance with labor relations laws. Diverting focus from core academic functions to complex administrative procedures to comply with union and collective bargaining obligations will only further the strain on already financially burdened administrative departments.

Morgan State University remains firmly committed to the success of all graduate assistants and postdoctoral associates. However, a collective bargaining environment for all graduate assistants, and postdoctoral associates will not lead to an enhancement of that success.

Therefore, Morgan State University respectfully urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 211/Senate Bill 166.

Sincerely,



David K. Wilson  
President, Morgan State University

# **SB166 Testimony by USM Chancellor Jay Perman Jan 3**

Uploaded by: Jay Perman

Position: UNF



## 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.

