

**January 27, 2026**

**Testimony:** SB0006 – State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Nontenure Track Faculty

**Committee:** Finance

**Hearing Date:** February 5, 2026

**Position:** Favorable

I am a longtime union lawyer, resident of Annapolis, Maryland, and write in my personal capacity to support the graduate student workers at the University of Maryland system, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland. For years, these workers—who teach classes, run laboratories, mentor students, and produce the research that sustains Maryland's public universities—have been denied their fundamental right to collectively bargain. To be clear, the question before this Committee is not whether graduate student workers deserve collective bargaining rights—the rest of the country has largely answered that question. The question is whether Maryland is prepared to live up to its own stated values and ensure that we all can live and work without having to worry about how to make rent or afford groceries.

Maryland currently enjoys a Democratic supermajority in the General Assembly, yet year after year legislation recognizing the basic workplace rights of graduate student workers has failed to advance. Collective Bargaining is not a radical concept—it is a cornerstone of workplace democracy. The repeated refusal to extend these rights to graduate student workers stands in stark contrast to our values.

The overwhelming majority of states—red, blue, and purple alike—already include universities that recognize Collective Bargaining rights for graduate student workers. States such as California, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, Washington, and Montana, among others, permit graduate workers to unionize at public universities. After recognizing graduate student collective bargaining rights, these university systems did not fail and in fact continue to thrive. Maryland's continued resistance is increasingly anomalous and indefensible.

The merits of SB0006 are compelling.

**First**, we are talking about a relatively modest scope to this legislation. By the most recent estimates, this legislation would cover approximately 6,000 graduate student workers statewide. These workers are central to the university mission—they teach discussion sections, lead labs, grade coursework, mentor undergraduates, and conduct the research that is foundational to the scholarship of these universities.

**Second**, Maryland has already recognized collective bargaining rights for faculty and staff at community colleges and for many other public employees. There, the feared consequences that the opposition to this legislation professes never materialized. The sky did not fall; budgets did not burst. Instead, labor peace improved, turnover decreased, and institutions benefited from clearer, more predictable workplace standards. There is no rational basis to treat graduate student workers in our community differently.

In support of SB0006

Page 1 of 2

**Third**, extending collective bargaining rights does not mandate specific wage increases or dictate contract outcomes. It simply guarantees a fair process. Collective bargaining allows employers and employees to negotiate within existing budgetary constraints and identify and resolve issues leading to greater retention.

**Fourth**, graduate student workers in the University of Maryland system receive stipends averaging just over \$26,000 per year while living in one of the most expensive regions in the country. Many rely on food assistance, take on unsustainable debt, or work second jobs, all while carrying significant teaching and research responsibilities. By failing to recognize their collective bargaining rights, our university systems profit off of the backs of graduate student workers and their modest incomes. They deserve a living wage. They deserve better.

In sum, this legislation speaks directly to our values. When educators fear retaliation for raising concerns about their working conditions everyone pays the price. When they are denied a voice at the table, the university is losing a valuable voice to improving curriculum and the student experience. Collective bargaining provides a mechanism that benefits not only workers, but students and institutions alike. And collective bargaining not only improves the lives of the directly impacted working people, but uplifts our society as a whole in ensuring that all workers can thrive and enjoy a good quality of life.

SB0006 is reasonable, fiscally responsible, and long overdue. I urge the Committee to give it a favorable report and allow Maryland to finally join the national consensus on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Morse III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**John H. Morse III, Esq.**