

My name is Emilyya 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 sustainable and fair standards are met so that the academic workers can focus on their work.

**Beyond improving day-to-day conditions, unions also provide an infrastructure for academic workers to respond to broader issues that threaten research and education.** Over the past year, academic worker unions have played a pivotal role in protecting research and education during periods of national uncertainty. In my union, workers successfully fought to prevent mass layoffs of researchers, lobbied and organized to sustain federal research funding, and secured access to hardship funds for workers impacted by government shutdowns to ensure they could keep their jobs. These efforts helped keep laboratories open, research progress moving forward, and the student workers making these discoveries supported. **This is what it looks like when workers have a union: stability for institutions and progress for public good.**

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 accessible and sustainable workplaces that remain known as exceptional institutions of higher learning and public good. By continuing to deny these rights, we risk falling behind other states, undermining our ability to attract and retain top talent.