



TIM SMITH  
DIRECTOR – REGION 8

GEORGE PALMER  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

January 26, 2026

To: Chairperson Pam Beidle, Vice Chair Antonio Hayes and  
Senate members of the Maryland State Finance Committee

RE: Senate Bill 84

Greetings,

UAW Region 8 strongly encourages a favorable report on **SB 84**. UAW represents more than 120,000 higher education workers around the country, including 6,500 in Maryland. Our members work every day to conduct groundbreaking research, teach classes, mentor students, secure grant dollars for their universities, and so much more. Their labor is critical to the mission of their institutions. Their ability to bargain collectively has made them better able to conduct those missions and has helped attract top talent to these institutions. Graduate workers have been experiencing the brunt of Trump’s attacks on higher education, and UAW higher education members have been leading the fight to defend research institutions from the disastrous funding cuts. For example, in 2025, UAW graduate workers and postdoctoral researchers at the University of California sued the Trump administration and won, successfully defending a major revenue stream for the university system.

A sustained majority of graduate workers at UMD have signed and otherwise demonstrated support for forming a union with UAW for two years. They have requested voluntary recognition from UMD but the lack of a statutory framework for collective bargaining has allowed the university to ignore the democratic will of graduate workers.

Graduate teaching assistants are indispensable to instruction of the more than 30,000 undergraduate students at UMD, providing an important engine of economic opportunity and upward mobility for Maryland families. Graduate research assistants drive innovation in a wide range of fields, including biomedical research, engineering, cybersecurity, and more fields which power the Maryland economy. Graduate workers are essential to bringing in [\\$748 million/year in research funding](#) and making the [\\$3.7 billion impact](#) of UMD on the state economy possible.

Graduate workers experience housing instability due to low pay, rampant harassment and discrimination, and other issues which hinder their ability to do their work. Current university-controlled mechanisms, such as “meet and confer,” have not been adequate to address these issues and are not a substitute for collective bargaining.

The national labor relations board ruled in 2016 that graduate assistants at private universities have collective bargaining rights. Many states around the country also grant graduate workers at public universities, including most states which have significant biomedical and tech economies. Many existing

graduate unions at top research institutions have existed for years and have been partners in promoting research and teaching excellence. UAW academic workers, including at the NIH and JHU in Maryland, have been leaders in the national fight against the damaging cuts to research funding. Of the 10 institutions listed as UMD [peer institutions](#), 8 have collective bargaining rights for their graduate workers (UC Berkeley, UCLA, UIUC, Univ. of Michigan Ann Arbor, Rutgers, Penn State, University of Washington, University of Minnesota). Public university graduate workers have collective bargaining rights in twenty-six states, passing this legislation would bring Maryland in line with other states around the country that value workers' rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a thin black rectangular border.

Tim Smith, Director  
UAW Region 8

TS:jlt  
opeiu494afl-cio  
enclosures  
cc: George Palmer  
Anthony Towner