

Alina Urena.pdf

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Position: FAV

Testimony from Alina Urena

The people who make my experience on campus truly memorable and enjoyable have been the multiple graduate student employees on campus. Every interaction I've had with them has been nothing short of amazing and it saddens me to see that the rights and benefits they receive are nowhere near at the level of service that they provide to the UMD community. I along with many others believe that UMD would be better if grad students had a union to help advocate for themselves.

Anjali Verma.pdf

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Position: FAV

Testimony from Anjali Verma

I am a third year graduate worker in the Biophysics program at UMD College Park. In the three years since I've been at Maryland, it's never been more clear that grads need collective bargaining rights. This year, more than ever, we need our bill to pass.

Since Trump took office, grads have had to grapple with an extremely uncertain funding landscape, attacks on immigrants, democratic backsliding, and a university administration that will not listen to us. And why would they? Without collective bargaining, UMD has complete power to determine our working conditions.

This past summer, hundreds of grads missed paychecks and some were not paid for 2+ months. It was Graduate Labor Union (GLU) grads who marched on admin buildings and informed Dean of the Graduate School Steven Roth that far more than the "two students" he heard about were not being paid. Collectivizing our concerns is the only way we can see real progress from UMD in addressing our workplace issues. As individuals, we are ignored or sent from office to office with no real recourse.

In departments across campus, we've also seen UMD roll back the flimsy "promises" that grads receive in our offer letters. Grads in physics watched this year as their contracts were changed from 12 months to 9 months overnight. Not one graduate worker was consulted about this decision, instead they learned about it via email in June about a contract change that would take effect within weeks. Grads across campus are also being told that promises of "X years of guaranteed funding" are no longer valid, and being pressured to graduate as soon as possible due to funding issues.

It's been a tough year at Maryland since Trump took office. As graduate workers, we know that collective bargaining won't fix all our problems, but a legally enforceable contract would give us protections we desperately need right now.

Bakican Ayna.pdf

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Position: FAV

Testimony from Bakican Ayna

Living cost has started to become unbearable. I can't even travel back home due to financial constraints.

SB 84 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining -

Uploaded by: Brian Wivell

Position: FAV

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1300

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Proudly representing the transit workers of the MTA!



SB 84 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants Favorable

Senate Finance Committee
January 29th, 2026

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 USM 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.

cci_SB084.pdf

Uploaded by: Caitlin Corona

Position: FAV

My name is Dr. Caitlin Corona-Long, and I am a Postdoctoral Fellow at the NIH. My research focuses on identifying neuroanatomical changes underlying differing outcomes in cognitive aging, particularly as it relates to memory and neurodegenerative disorders. I am also a proud Union organizer with NIH Fellows United/UAW2750. I am writing to strongly support the unionization efforts of University of Maryland graduate workers.

For most of my PhD studies at Johns Hopkins University, I was not a unionized worker. It wasn't until the last year of my PhD that other graduate workers gathered together and organized to improve working conditions across all Hopkins campuses. Becoming unionized was life-changing for me as an individual worker. I finally made enough money to pay rent and other expenses, allowing me to focus more on my research. Being unionized facilitated the most productive year of my graduate studies.

I was ecstatic to join the NIH and join thousands of other scientists doing life-saving research. As a unionized federal worker, my union has allowed me to focus on my research amidst these unprecedented attacks on science. I know my rights as a worker, and I work with other members to make sure that each Fellow we represent knows that they have a right to a safe and stable working environment.

Being a unionized worker allows me to reach my full potential as a scientist. For this reason alone, I support the passing of SBO84. Passing this bill will not just improve the lives of graduate student workers, but enrich the world they are tirelessly working to improve.

SB0084 – State Personnel – Collective Bargaining –

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB0084

State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Graduate Assistants

Bill Sponsor: Senator Kramer

Committee: Finance

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0084 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, 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.

Charles Reisner.pdf

Uploaded by: Charles Reisner

Position: FAV

Testimony from Charles Reisner

I am a second year graduate student in the Astronomy department at UMD. In that time, one thing has become blatantly clear to me— despite what the UMS lobbyists or the administration claims about the university not being able to afford to recognize the graduate labor union, the opposite is true. The university system, and by extension, the state of Maryland, can't afford not to recognize us. As graduate workers at UMD, we bring in around \$748 million dollars for the university annually in research alone. This isn't counting the revenue generated by teaching assistants, many of whom are balancing teaching, classes, and research. If graduate students can afford food and rent, the quality of their research will increase, the quality of their teaching will increase, and by extension the quality of the university will increase. Over the past several months, I've represented my department in our efforts to unionize. In that time, I've talked to hundreds of graduate students in person and over the phone. The main source of apprehension I get is always the same. International students are scared. The statement usually goes, "I am completely supportive of the union's efforts, but I just can't put my name or face out there right now". These aren't just 'students' and these aren't kids— these are employees who do most of the heavy lifting for the university, and they don't feel safe. How will this look to a prospective graduate student deciding between a university in the USM system and somewhere else? That's why we don't see the ratification of this bill as a cost to the state, but an investment. We love our jobs and the research we do. What we're asking is that we can continue to do them here.

SB 84 AFSCME Council 3 testimony_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Christian Gobel

Position: FAV



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Patrick Moran – President

**SB84 – State Personnel – Collective Bargaining –
Graduate Assistants
Finance Committee
January 29, 2026**

FAVORABLE

AFSCME Maryland Council 3 supports Senate Bill 84. Senate Bill 84 establishes collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants who work at a University System of Maryland institution, Morgan State University, or St. Mary's College. The legislation also establishes a separate bargaining unit for graduate assistants. Collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants are long overdue, and AFSCME applauds the sponsors for advancing this legislation.

AFSCME Maryland Council 3 represents approximately 55,000 public service workers across varying levels of government including city, county, state, and higher education. AFSCME members are on the frontlines every day delivering critical public services our communities depend on.

Graduate workers in the private sector and numerous public sector jurisdictions already possess the freedom 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 (NLRA).¹ 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 NLRA.² A decade ago, the NLRB reversed prior precedent issued under the Bush Administration, which had overturned the *New York University* decision.³ The Board's decision to reinstate 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 and procedure of collective bargaining.⁴ Notably, the Board concluded that the existence of an additional relationship, e.g. an academic relationship, did not preclude the NLRA from applying to graduate assistants.⁵

¹ *Boston Medical Center*, 330 NLRB 152 (1999).

² *New York University*, 332 NLRB 1205 (2000).

³ *Columbia University*, 364 NLRB No. 90 (2016).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.* at 6.

Similarly, numerous public sector jurisdictions across the country recognize the freedom to collectively bargain for graduate assistants.⁶ Approximately 57 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.⁷ Graduate student workers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison established the first collective bargaining agreement for graduate teaching assistants in the U.S. in 1970.⁸ Shortly thereafter, graduate student workers in New Jersey at Rutgers University reached their first collective bargaining agreement in 1972.⁹ In sum, 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, a majority 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 graduate workers would be able to join a union and have the freedom to collectively bargain. The graduate workers at the University of Maryland for voluntary recognition, yet the University refused. The General Assembly 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 84.

⁶ 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.

⁷ *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).

⁸ *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>.

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



SEIU Local 500 - Testimony in Support of SB 84 202

Uploaded by: Christopher Cano

Position: FAV



Testimony - SB 84, State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants
Favorable

Senate Finance Committee

January 29, 2026

Christopher C. Cano, MPA

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

Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of higher education workers across the public and private universities and colleges throughout D.C. and Maryland. We stand here today in strong support of this bill. This legislation takes an essential and long-overdue step toward correcting a structural injustice in Maryland's higher education system by extending collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants at public institutions of higher education.

For decades, graduate assistants—who serve as teaching assistants, research assistants, fellows, and postdoctoral interns—have been excluded from collective bargaining protections under State law, despite performing core instructional and research functions that are indispensable to the mission of our public universities. Senate Bill 84 directly addresses this inequity by clearly defining graduate assistants as employees with the right to organize and bargain collectively and by establishing a dedicated bargaining unit for them.

Graduate assistants are workers. They teach courses, lead discussion sections, grade assignments, conduct grant-funded research, and contribute directly to the academic reputation and financial viability of Maryland's public institutions. Yet, unlike many other public employees, they have been denied a meaningful voice in determining their wages, working conditions, health benefits, workload protections, and grievance procedures. This disenfranchisement has left graduate assistants vulnerable to

inconsistent standards, economic precarity, and unilateral decision-making by their employer.

SEIU Local 500 also urges the Committee to view Senate Bill 84 in the broader context of labor rights in higher education. Graduate assistants are not the only group within Maryland's universities who remain excluded from collective bargaining. Faculty at public institutions—particularly non-tenure-track and contingent faculty—continue to be shut out of the collective bargaining framework altogether. While SB 84 does not resolve every gap in higher education labor law, it represents critical progress toward dismantling a system that has historically denied academic workers the same fundamental rights afforded to other public employees.

By passing Senate Bill 84, the General Assembly affirms that the people who teach our students and produce groundbreaking research deserve dignity, fairness, and a legally protected seat at the table. Collective bargaining will promote stability, equity, and transparency across our institutions while strengthening the quality of higher education for students and communities statewide.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 84. Thank you to Senators Kramer and Lam for leading on this important issue.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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

Claire McDonald.pdf

Uploaded by: Claire McDonald

Position: FAV

Testimony from Claire McDonald

Having a union and bargaining rights would help improve the pay equity for UMBC graduate student workers! Our current pay is not commensurate with the rising cost of living, especially regarding rent and groceries.

BTU Testimony SB84 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Cristina E Duncan Evans

Position: FAV



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**Senate Bill 84 – State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants
Finance Committee
January 29, 2026**

FAVORABLE

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents over 9,000 employees of Baltimore City Public Schools, including teachers, paraprofessionals, school secretaries, counselors, librarians, clinicians, transportation aides, and school support staff. Our members are on the frontlines of public education everyday, and strive to ensure a safe learning environment for the students we serve. Our work to educate, support and develop Baltimore City’s young people, is grounded in the protections and rights we have from collective bargaining, and we recognize that all workers deserve the right to have a meaningful voice in their working conditions. As educators, our legacy of collective bargaining has long advocated for the learning conditions that students need in order to thrive, as our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions. The Baltimore Teachers Union is writing in strong **support** of SB 84 and **we request that the committee issue a favorable report.**

Graduate assistants are essential to the functioning of our colleges and universities. They teach classes, lead discussion sections and labs, grade assignments, mentor undergraduates, conduct research, and provide critical instructional support—often while carrying heavy academic workloads of their own. Yet too often, these workers do not have fair compensation, stable appointments, or a meaningful voice in their working conditions. This bill recognizes the reality of their labor and affirms that graduate assistants are workers who deserve the same fundamental rights as others in the public sector: the right to unionize and collectively bargain over wages, hours, and working conditions.

Collective bargaining strengthens higher education. When graduate assistants have a seat at the table, institutions benefit from improved retention, more consistent instruction, and stronger academic support for students. Fair workloads, reasonable pay, access to healthcare, and clear job protections allow graduate workers to focus on teaching and research rather than financial insecurity or burnout. In turn, undergraduates receive higher-quality instruction, more mentorship, and more stable learning environments, while universities benefit from a more sustainable and equitable workforce.

At a time when public higher education is under immense pressure, we must invest in the people who make it possible. Extending collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants is not only a matter of workplace fairness—it is an investment in educational quality, academic excellence, and student success.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Teachers Union urges a favorable report on this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

UMD testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Danielle Buglak

Position: FAV

My name is Dr. Danielle Buglak, and I am a postdoctoral fellow at the National Institutes of Health, as well as an organizer and Political Events Lead for the Citizenship and Legislative (CAP) committee for our fellows union, UAW 2750. I am writing to strongly support passage of SB084, which would enable graduate students at the University of Maryland to form a union.

As a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, I was not part of a labor union. While I was fortunate to have a positive graduate research experience, many of my friends and colleagues did not, dealing with harassment, overwork, and exploitation, often with little recourse. Despite producing cutting edge research, teaching courses, and obtaining grant funding for the university, we had no bargaining power to negotiate our stipends, benefits, or working conditions. For me, this meant increasing deductibles and limited treatment options with my insurance at a time when my health was worsening due to chronic illness.

As a postdoctoral researcher at the NIH, I have seen firsthand the benefits of unionized research. Since forming our union, I now have greater protections and resources as a disabled fellow, enabling me to be healthier, happier, and more productive. Our union provides fellows with a voice and seat at the table in decisions that impact our working environments. Our union has also been at the forefront in protecting scientific research in the face of ongoing cuts by the Trump administration, including our Kill the Cuts rallies, lobbying to protect funding for scientific researchers, and our Shutdown Relief Fund, which provided \$500 a week to members who were not receiving paychecks during the 43 day government shutdown this past fall. Without our union, many of these efforts would not have been possible.

Collective bargaining for graduate students will improve their workplace conditions. Happier and healthier workers are more productive workers. Graduate unions at other universities, including the University of Michigan and University of California system, have proven that research and productivity do not collapse as a result of unionization.

I have benefited so much from our union, and graduated students at the University of Maryland deserve the same rights. I strongly urge you to support this legislation to give graduate students at the University of Maryland the right to unionize.

SB84_FAV.pdf

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Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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SB 84 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

Senate Finance Committee

January 29, 2026

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards

President

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 84. On behalf of our 700 affiliated unions, I offer the following comments.

Collective bargaining is an exercise of freedom and democracy. Collective bargaining unites workers through their union to negotiate as equals with employers, determine wages, hours, leave, safety, and work-life balance. SB 84 is enabling legislation allowing graduate workers at the University System of Maryland (USM), Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland 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 graduate workers 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. As of January 2024, there were around 150,000 graduate student workers represented by a union across the country. This equates to about a third or 38% of all graduate workers belonging to a union.

In 2021, Maryland expanded unionization rights to community colleges across the state. As of today, there are several higher education institutions with unionized faculty or part-time faculty in Maryland and that number will only grow over the next few years. 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. These



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schools greatly benefit from unionization by attracting and retaining top talent across the board, providing a baseline of representation from one generation of students to the next.

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, USM schools widely recognized how essential graduate assistants 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.” 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, then reaffirmed by the Biden NLRB in 2021 and again in 2023, has emphatically decided that graduate assistants are workers.

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 USM 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 act to allow graduate workers to collectively negotiate with USM, Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

SB 84 provides a balanced approach to expanding collective bargaining rights. Graduate workers, like all workers, deserve the right to unionize.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 84.



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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.





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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.
Pennsylvania State University	Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE) - UAW	Already recognized & bargaining.	In 2025, graduate workers overwhelmingly voted in favor of forming a union. The Pennsylvania Labor Relations



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			Coalition recognized the union in 2025 to collectively bargain.
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.	In 2021, the IGWC delivered over 1,600 signed cards to the University President demanding an election.
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	Graduate Student Labor Coalition OSU	Denied the right to collectively bargain by law.	Ohio Revised Code Chapter 4117.01 (c)(11) prohibits graduate assistant unionization.





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Appendix 2: The State of Faculty & Part Time Faculty Collective Bargaining in Maryland's Higher Education Institutions

Maryland University	Faculty Union Name	Part-Time Faculty Union Name
Anne Arundel Community College	Riverhawk Educator's Union	SEIU 500
Frederick Community College	AFT-MD	AFT-MD
Goucher College	SEIU 500	SEIU 500
Harford Community College	MSEA	MSEA
Howard Community College	AFT-MD	SEIU
Maryland Institute College of Art	SEIU 500	SEIU 500
McDaniel College	SEIU 500	SEIU 500
Montgomery College	AFT-MD	SEIU 500
Wor-Wic Community College	MSEA	MSEA
Prince George's Community College	AFT-MD	AFT-MD



WDC Testimony - SB0084 Collective Bargaining Grad

Uploaded by: Dorothy Manevich

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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www.womensdemocraticclub.org

Senate Bill 0084: State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

**Advancing Democracy Committee – January 25, 2026
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club** (WDC) for the 2026 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges a favorable report of SB0084. This bill extends collective bargaining rights to Graduate Assistants in the University of Maryland system. WDC supports this bill because collective bargaining agreements are one of the best ways to protect women in higher education.

According to a 2016 [study](#), about a third of women in graduate programs experience sexual or gender-based harassment at the hands of faculty or staff at the university. These experiences run the gamut from condescending and misogynistic remarks about women's intelligence, to pregnancy discrimination, to unwanted sexual advances and assaults. Many women [do not report](#) this harassment because they are afraid of professional retaliation and do not trust their university to fairly adjudicate their case. When a victim makes a complaint, she is often alone and up against a perpetrator with more status, more power, a deeper network, and more money. This imbalanced system has led to [multiple scandals](#) in higher education, where repeat perpetrators have historically gotten slaps on the wrist or escaped accountability for decades.

A collective bargaining agreement [evens the playing field](#) and allows more women to feel safe coming forward in the face of sexual and gender-based harassment at universities. Within the grievance arbitration process afforded by labor law, victims can choose to address their problem with the full legal and material backing of their union. Instead of facing a biased, opaque system alone, women can come to the arbitration table as a union member on equal footing with their employer.

Collective bargaining has been one of the primary ways graduate workers have [won](#) real protections against sexual harassment and discrimination. Graduate assistants at UMD deserve the chance to get these protections, like their private sector counterparts at universities like Johns Hopkins and like other public employees in the state that have long had the right to collectively bargain.

We ask for your support for SB0084.

Cynthia Rubenstein
WDC President

Dorothy Manevich
WDC Advancing Democracy
Subcommittee

Kate Stein
WDC Advocacy Chair

SB0084%20testimony.pdf.pdf

Uploaded by: emilya ventriglia

Position: FAV

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.

Chatelaine_SB084.pdf

Uploaded by: Haley Chatelaine

Position: FAV

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. Not only have we won these contractual protections, but we have also been able to maintain our job security and funding at NIH, as no UAW 2750 bargaining unit members were fired amidst the unprecedented federal firings of 2025, and we directly lobbied Congress as a full unit to maintain NIH funding. Now that I have seen what is possible, I firmly believe all graduate workers need access to this invaluable tool for both democratic and scientific progress.

I was bullied by my advisor 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 financial strain amidst a complete lack of protections for workplace harassment, begging the question of how much more productive my science could have been if I had the power to directly address the common workplace issues I was facing. 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 only have selected a graduate school with collective bargaining protections. In fact, I would not have been limited in my selection, as 26 states already enable collective bargaining rights for graduate workers at state institutions.

If this is my story as one person, there are doubtless more—and likely even more extreme—stories among the more than 4000 graduate workers at the University of Maryland. But these same workers 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.

Henry Hausmann.pdf

Uploaded by: Henry Hausmann

Position: FAV

Testimony from Henry Hausmann

I am a graduate of the University of Maryland with a PhD in 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.

%20SB%2084%20FAV%20USM%20Student%20Council.pdf.pdf

Uploaded by: Jaden Farris

Position: FAV

Jaden T. Farris
Director of Government Relations



Qamryn Askew
Director of Government Relations

BILL: SB 84 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants
COMMITTEE: Finance
DATE: January 29, 2026
POSITION: FAVORABLE

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 84.

Graduate assistants are important members of our academic communities. They facilitate and support the teaching of their peers, 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, and limited avenues to address workplace concerns.

It is important to note that graduate students are both students **and** workers. Graduate students do not contest the educational benefits of their work. However, teaching classes, engaging in funded research, grading, and providing instructional labor are all essential functions of a university.

Receiving tuition remission does not negate worker status; rather, they are the unique compensation structures that the higher education system provides. The recognition of graduate students as workers in the context of collective bargaining does not erase their student identity but recognizes the reality of their employment.

Furthermore, collective bargaining advances principles of shared governance by formalizing participation, accountability, and follow-through in areas where it traditionally had limited reach and effectiveness.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report from the committee.

Jaden T. Farris
Director of Government Relations
jadenfarris@umbc.edu

Qamryn Askew
Director of Government Relations
qaskew1@umbc.edu

Jenna Russell.pdf

Uploaded by: Jenna Russell

Position: FAV

Testimony from Jenna Russell

I transferred with my advisor part-way through my PhD. At our old institution, health care was completely covered, and wages were higher due to the union negotiating for fair pay as the cost of living dramatically increases. UMD would create a much better work environment for their students if we didn't have to worry about things like the rising costs of healthcare and having enough take home pay to do more than scrape by. It's embarrassing that UMD does not care about nor recognize their graduate students. It shows that UMD sees graduate students not as the cornerstone of the university but as cheap labor to exploit as much as possible. This summer, pay was withheld for over a month due to errors and miscommunication from UMD, which for some of my peers would be devastating. How are students expected to continue research when they cannot even pay rent? When asked, I tell all potential students not to come to UMD, as the university offers terrible benefits and salary as compared to peer institutions. All of the other 6 PhD programs I was accepted to have and recognize their graduate unions. JHU, just up the road, offers a salary over 50k per year as well as healthcare and other benefits. While most of my fellow PhD students haven't known differently, I can speak first hand about the lack of community and support at UMD in comparison to peer universities. The state and university need to stop embarrassing themselves and recognize the graduate union,.

SB84_MSEA_Cook_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Jessica Cook

Position: FAV



140 Main Street
Annapolis, MD 21401
800 448 6782
410 263 6600

marylandeducators.org

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 84
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Graduate Assistants

Senate Finance Committee
January 29, 2026
3:00 pm

Jessica Cook
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 84. This legislation would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants 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.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools and community colleges, teaching and supporting our almost 900,000 K-12 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA represents 44 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.¹ Senate Bill 84 makes meaningful progress to correct

¹ 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.

Collective bargaining for graduate assistants is neither unique, nor is it novel. California is one of the most prominent areas where graduate assistants 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.² Collective bargaining relationships in Nebraska persist to this day between institutions of higher education and labor unions representing faculty and other higher education workers.³ Again, these collective bargaining relationships have persisted for decades and continue to the present.⁴

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. 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 84.

² 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).

³ 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.

⁴ 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>.

1.27.26 Support for Maryland Graduate Student Work

Uploaded by: John Morse

Position: FAV

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.

Kennedy Davis.pdf

Uploaded by: Kennedy Davis

Position: FAV

Testimony from Kennedy Davis

I look for additional work opportunities to try to make ends meet. Recognizing that my department's stipend is considered one of the higher ones, I am deeply concerned for the financial stability and well-being of my colleagues in departments with even lower funding. A union would ensure that my fellow graduate students won't go hungry.

kinan bazzi.pdf

Uploaded by: Kinan Bazzi

Position: FAV

Testimony from kinan bazzi

Many graduate students find themselves navigating a difficult balance between academic responsibilities and real labor. They often teach classes, grade assignments, and conduct university research, yet lack the same rights and protections as other employees. Without the ability to collectively bargain, they have little say over their pay, work hours, or conditions. Unionizing offers a pathway for grad workers to stand together and advocate for fair treatment, livable wages, and a stronger voice in shaping the academic institutions they help power

Lixin Zheng.pdf

Uploaded by: Lixin Zheng

Position: FAV

Testimony from Lixin Zheng

Sometimes, I look around and think about what my undergraduate math friends are up to. The competitive and driven ones have gone to do quantitative finance or consulting. The analytic ones - data science or actuarial work. So few of them are pursuing a graduate degree.

Then I look around in my department, at the various 5th, 6th, and even 7th years around me. Many of them are frantically applying for jobs, worrying that they won't be funded for the next year, even though their projects are unfinished. Some of them have children, yet they don't get parental leave or time off. Others have to use their low stipend to support their family back home in a different country. Why would people want to go into academia, if these are the conditions we get for six years?

Giving collective bargaining rights for graduate students is not only essential for us, it's necessary for the future of academia. Graduate students are the future of math and the sciences, and a union ensures that students actually want to pursue these subjects in the future.

Marjorie Leinstein Testimony for SB084.pdf

Uploaded by: Marjorie Leinstein

Position: FAV

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

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 and large collective actions this past year. 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.

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Uploaded by: Marjorie Leinstein

Position: FAV

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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.

UAW 2750 Testimony for SB084.pdf

Uploaded by: Marjorie Leinstein

Position: FAV

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of UAW Local 2750, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 84 granting collective bargaining rights to graduate workers at the University of Maryland. We represent approximately 5,000 Fellows at the National Institutes of Health. Our membership has passed a resolution in solidarity with UMD graduate workers, and passing this legislation is a key legislative priority for our local.

Maryland is home to a growing community of unionized higher education workers. With UAW Local 2750 and Johns Hopkins postdoctoral workers, there are now around 6,500 higher education workers represented by UAW in Maryland. Our collective bargaining agreements strengthen not only our own workplaces but the entire research ecosystem across the state. When graduate workers at UMD gain the right to organize, they will join a powerful network of unionized researchers working together to protect Maryland's position as a national leader in scientific research and innovation.

Our union's experience demonstrates the critical importance of collective bargaining rights for research workers. When federal Reductions in Force (RIFs) threatened workers across the country last year, Maryland was especially heavily affected. Without union protections, many NIH Fellows would have faced job loss during the RIFs, a loss that would have devastated both individual researchers and Maryland's research strength; however, no one in our bargaining unit was terminated.

Beyond protecting our own jobs, we fought hard for NIH funding, which brings billions of dollars to Maryland's economy and supports thousands of jobs across the state. This fight was only possible because we had the collective power and organizational infrastructure that comes with union representation. Graduate workers at UMD deserve these same tools to advocate for their profession and their community.

University of Maryland graduate workers have demonstrated overwhelming and sustained support for unionization, more than 60% signed union authorization cards, over 1,000 workers participated in an informational picket last spring, and another 1,000+ turned out for a majority march this fall. Despite this clear mandate, these workers remain blocked from exercising their fundamental right to collective bargaining because of outdated state legislation.

In this moment of ongoing assaults on labor rights and threats to scientific research, solidarity between Maryland's higher education workers is more important than ever. Graduate workers at UMD have earned the right to collectively bargain through their demonstrated support and organizing strength. Maryland should lead the nation in

supporting scientific workers, not lag behind states that already grant these fundamental rights.

We urge the Maryland General Assembly to pass Senate Bill 84 granting collective bargaining rights to University of Maryland graduate workers. Maryland's research community will be stronger when all of its workers have the power to negotiate for the protections and support they deserve.

In solidarity,

UAW Local 2750

Independent%20Undergraduate%20Testimony%20in%20Fav

Uploaded by: Mofi Solarin

Position: FAV

Testimony in Favor of SB0084

Good afternoon Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee.

My name is Mofi Solarin, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland - College Park and I'm testifying independently in support of SB0084.

Although I am not a graduate student, I see the impact graduate students make every day on my campus. They are our teaching assistants, discussion leaders, lab instructors, mentors, and researchers. Their dedication and passion often goes under appreciated which brings me and a lot of other undergraduate students great sadness. They are often the people undergraduates interact with most closely, I have completed entire courses where I never laid eyes on the professor ever but the graduate assistants were there day in day out and they play a major role in our learning, academic success, and sense of belonging at our institutions. I've had graduate students go out of their way to create study guides for students, host multi-day study sessions and office hours to guarantee our success as undergraduate students. Most times it feels like they care more about us than actual professors yet universities constantly overlook these passionate, young and bright minds. It almost feels like they're being punished for wanting to pursue higher education which should not be the case especially in a world where intellectuals are essentially a dying breed.

Graduate students carry significant responsibility while balancing heavy workloads, research expectations, and teaching duties often with limited financial support and little institutional protection. When graduate students are overworked or under-supported, it does not only affect them; it affects the quality of undergraduate education, the pace of research, and the overall health of the campus community.

As an undergraduate, I benefit directly from the labor and dedication of graduate students. They answer questions outside of class, provide mentorship, write letters of recommendation, and help guide students who are navigating college for the first time or even students like myself interested in graduate programs. Many of them are doing this while struggling to afford housing, healthcare, or basic necessities. That is not sustainable, and it is not fair. No member of my Terp family should have to deal with this, and no Maryland-er at large should either.

By improving conditions for graduate students or at least giving them the collective bargaining rights to do so, this bill helps ensure stable teaching, stronger research, and better outcomes for undergraduates like me and campus communities at large.

Supporting graduate students is an investment in educational quality and institutional excellence across Maryland. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB0084.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Go Terps!

GLU Bill Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Mohammad Abukhdeir

Position: FAV

January 27, 2026

Chair Pamela Beidle

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony In Support of SB84 Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

Dear Chair Pamela Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB84, which would give graduate students in the University System of Maryland the right to collective bargaining with their employers.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park, graduate students have played a significant role in my education. They are the backbone of higher academia, and I cannot imagine my college experience without them. In classrooms with dozens of students, they are essential in effective education, as it is impossible for a single professor to give every student the support and information they need single-handedly. In research, they are responsible for almost all of the labor. On top of that, aside from the value they provide now for their institutions, they are training to become the next generation of professors who will lead academia in the future. For this reason, supporting them financially and listening to their voices is not a liability for Universities, but an investment in preserving their programs for the future.

Despite all the work that graduate students do, I have also seen firsthand the injustice they face at the hands of professors and the institutions they work for. The limited stipends they receive are predatory in and of themselves. Despite their essential role, graduate assistants are among the most economically vulnerable workers in higher education. The Economic Policy Institute reports that the median stipend for graduate assistants nationwide typically falls between \$20,000 and \$25,000 per year, often without year-round pay, while many are required to pay mandatory fees back to the very institutions that employ them. In high-cost regions, including Maryland, this places graduate workers at or near housing and food insecurity.

This is aside from the fact that the supposedly “contractually obligated” stipends are some of the first expenditures to go amidst budget cuts, which are all too prevalent in academia under the Trump administration. This is unconscionable in and of itself.

The hierarchical structure of academia prevents graduate students from being able to speak out against this injustice as well. How can we deny the students holding up academia on their shoulders the right to even negotiate for better conditions?

The fact that this right to simply express disdain with the system as it stands isn't already enshrined is itself an injustice, and one I sincerely hope you will correct by voting favorably on SB84. Most if not all of the legislature is college-educated, and has in some way benefited from the hard work of graduate students in the past. Please allow them to continue working in stability.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mohammad Abukhdeir

Pavan Raj Ravi.pdf

Uploaded by: Pavan Raj Ravi

Position: FAV

Testimony from Pavan Raj Ravi

"Between rising rents and mandatory fees, it's becoming harder for graduate students to focus on their degrees without constant financial stress. I believe organizing is the best way to ensure our stipends keep pace with the actual cost of living in Maryland, making graduate education at UMBC more equitable and sustainable."

Peymaan Motevalli-Aliabadi.pdf

Uploaded by: Peymaan Motevalli-Aliabadi

Position: FAV

Testimony from Peymaan Motevalli-Aliabadi

Discrepancy in TA workload within the ARCH department dependent on instructor. Low living wage leaves little room outside of rent expenses. Rent is over 60% of my 9.5 month contract stipend. Tuition remission not used in winter of 9.5 months contract should be able to be used in summer. A union could help to negotiate these conditions with the school and level the TA/GA experience. Within and across departments.

Riley Lankes.pdf

Uploaded by: Riley Lankes

Position: FAV

Testimony from Riley Lankes

My name is Riley Lankes, I'm a graduate worker and PhD student in UMD's College of Information.

Graduate workers at UMD need a union, plain and simple. I could choose from any number of reasons why. The extra hours many of us grad workers put in outside of what we're paid for are one reason – this is the work keeps classes and research at this university running, yet so much of it goes uncompensated. The “guaranteed funding” which makes up the shoestring budget I live on, poised to evaporate at any time in the face of federal cuts, is another reason. Critical as these are, these are not the primary reason I wrote this testimony.

I'm wrote this because many of my peers are afraid to do so themselves. They fear having their visas canceled, their funding cut, their lives upended for the crime of speaking up. This climate of fear is un-American, and it disgusts me. It is the right of the people to speak freely, to peaceably to assemble, and to petition for a redress of grievances. The fact that so many are afraid to exercise these rights is exactly why we need a union. A legally enforceable contract gives protections we desperately need right now.

United we stand. Stand with us. Pass MD SB84.

sb84 testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Riona Sheikh

Position: FAV

January 29, 2026

Chair Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony in Support of SB84 State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

Good afternoon. My name is Riona Sheikh, and I am a student at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the Executive Vice President of UMD's Student Government Association. I am here to express my strong support for graduate students' collective bargaining rights at Morgan State University, as proposed by Senate Bill 84.

I have spoken directly with graduate students at UMD. I have heard their stories, and their experiences have been well-documented in our campus media.

Many graduate workers at UMD have not been able to afford more than one meal a day. Graduate workers rely on the campus food pantry at higher rates than undergraduate students, and many of these students are forced to work multiple jobs simply to afford rent.

According to MIT's living wage calculator, the estimated livable wage for one person in Prince George's County, where UMD is located, is \$58,643. But the stipend for a 9.5-month graduate worker is just \$28,406 at UMD. At Morgan State—and for graduate workers across Maryland and the country—the situation is not so different.

Graduate students come to universities to learn. They should not have to struggle to afford basic housing or worry about when their next meal will be. At the very least, they deserve to have a seat at the table with administrators to discuss working conditions and concerns.

Unfortunately, that has been increasingly difficult for graduate workers to achieve. I have seen firsthand how the concerns of graduate students and workers have been repeatedly dismissed by university administrators.

For these reasons, I strongly believe a state law recognizing graduate workers' collective bargaining rights must be passed. These are students, and their focus should be on learning. These are workers, and their collective bargaining rights deserve protection.

The University of Maryland SGA stands in firm support of graduate students' right to collective bargaining across the University System of Maryland. I urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 84.

Thank you.

Rose Ying.pdf

Uploaded by: Rose Ying

Position: FAV

Testimony from Rose Ying

The university frequently argues that the work research assistants and fellows do isn't labor because some of it goes towards our dissertations, but my graduate experience is a prime example of why this is a disingenuous argument. In my program, many of my peers work at labs outside of campus, including at 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, regardless if that work is part of their thesis or not. On the other hand, UMD refuses to recognize graduates as workers despite the fact that UMD's academic status as a premiere research institution in the nation is not possible without the labor of grads who collect the data to both earn and fulfill multi-million dollar research grants. Because I happen to work on UMD's campus, I am paid significantly below my NIH peers, I do not get access to a grievance process overseen by a neutral party, I can't park on campus to do essential experiments during game days, and I do not have a democratic say in the policies that affect my work.

As my program's Graduate Student Government (GSG) representative for 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 issues like the lack of parental leave, protections for international students, and lack of transportation to campus, and have been met time and time again with excuses, deflection, or been flat out ignored. 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 in multiple years advocating for voluntary recognition of our union, in addition to legislation supporting this collective bargaining rights bill. The Graduate Assistant Advisory Council has also released statements supporting collective bargaining. Yet despite this, and despite the Graduate Labor Union's sustained supermajority support on authorization cards, UMD and USM administrators continue to lobby against collective bargaining for grads, claiming that it's not in our best interest and even that grad workers don't really want this. Unlike administrators, I have spent over 5 years at this campus talking to hundreds of my peers, and in these conversations, nearly every single grad supports having a union contract. 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.

Sam Christenson.pdf

Uploaded by: Sam Christenson

Position: FAV

Testimony from Sam Christenson

The recipients of UMCES awards received an email on 1/8/26 titled "Award recipient expectations" that stated that students receiving UMCES financial support are now expected to "contribute to building our educational program." The email says this workload should be "equivalent or less than that of a typical graduate or teaching assistantship" and lists several options for students: TAing a MEES course, working for the education office, supporting the CGC, developing digital content, or assisting with workshops.

This will be a manageable commitment for me, but it isn't great that I am now expected to do additional work to receive the funds I was promised from the fellowship I started the program with.

SB84 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Shubh Agnihotri

Position: FAV

To: Members of the Senate Finance Committee
From: Shubh Agnihotri
01/27/2025
RE: SBO084 - SUPPORT

Members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Shubh Agnihotri and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I serve on the Student Government Association as the director of Transportation & Infrastructure.

Our graduate workers at UMD are vital to the success of the undergraduate students around them. They are the most knowledgeable, kind, and helpful people I have met in my classes here. But without collective bargaining rights, grad workers are dependent on non-guaranteed jobs, low wages and poor benefits compared to our peer institutions. Their top priority should be their professional development, research and happiness, not whether they are able to put food on the table for their families. Graduate workers access the campus food pantry at a higher rate than undergraduate students do and the pantry has begged us in SGA for funding this year. New graduate worker housing built by the university is prohibitively expensive for most grads based on their wages. Many international graduate workers are also hurt without a union because the uncertainty of wages and assistant positions affects them much more severely.

SGA has attempted twice to urge UMD and the University System of Maryland to voluntarily recognize the Graduate Labor Union at UMD. Each time SGA and grad workers meet with UMD or USM officials we have been treated like children and told by each office we meet that they have no power to change anything. They refused to give us the dignity of a response to the letter we prepared, even following a meeting, and insinuated that the SGA has an equivalent lobbying power to the USM. President Darryll Pines seems deeply offended when it is suggested that graduate workers are underpaid and struggling to make ends meet. **It is clear that we have exhausted the internal methods for change on this issue and there is no solution but legislation.** Senate Bill 84 is desperately needed to force all USM institutions to recognize Graduate Labor Unions in each system school. A unionized graduate worker body is a strong graduate worker body. Our state budget and USM spending should never be balanced upon the backs of graduate workers again.

I urge a favorable committee report on SBO084. Thank you for your work on the Finance Committee and for your consideration of this testimony.

SB84_AFT-MD_FAV

Uploaded by: Taylor Reynolds

Position: FAV



A Union of Professionals
AFT-Maryland

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Kenya Campbell
PRESIDENT

LaBrina Hopkins
SECRETARY-TREASURER

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
SB 84
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining –
Graduate Assistants
January 29, 2026
FAVORABLE**

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 84, the bill that would lift the unfair exemption to collective bargaining rights to graduate workers 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 84. We call for a favorable report. Thank you.

Maryland State Finance Committee Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Tim Smith

Position: FAV



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA - UAW

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

Yun Zeng.pdf

Uploaded by: Yun Zeng

Position: FAV

Testimony from Yun Zeng

A union can provide legal guidance and representation related to graduate student employment changes, and centralized communication can help us understand and respond to policy shifts affecting funding, visas, or employment rules.

For example, my department changed our contracts from 12 months to 9.5 months last year due to a lack of funding. If we had a graduate student union, it could help assess the legitimacy of this action, clarify whether proper procedures were followed, and represent students in challenging or negotiating such changes collectively.

Yunhui Bai.pdf

Uploaded by: Yunhui Bai

Position: FAV

Testimony from Yunhui Bai

As an international student, I rely solely on my salary as a graduate assistant at UMD to survive. The whole area is extremely expensive. Most of the rentals require that I make 2.5x the rent. Since I'm only receiving less than \$2500 per month (for 9.5 months!), I can't rent anywhere more expensive than \$1000/month. However, given this area is so expensive, it is extremely difficult to find a rental under that price even when I am willing to have one or two roommates. The student apartments around campus are also very expensive. A room in a 4-bedroom apartment is easily more than \$1000/month. I think the cost of living expectations the university have on us don't align with the reality of this area. It is true that TA is a part time job, but I live my life full time on that salary.

SB84_USM.pdf

Uploaded by: Andy Clark

Position: UNF



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Senate Bill 84

State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

January 29, 2026

Unfavorable

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 84.

Graduate students are fundamentally learners, not traditional employees. Their primary role is to advance their academic development through teaching and research under the guidance of faculty mentors. Collective bargaining could reframe this educational relationship into a transactional labor relationship, which may erode mentorship and impede academic flexibility. Although collective bargaining could possibly grant students legally enforceable contracts to secure stipends and job security, this transforms the student-mentor dynamic into a collective negotiation setting – casting students as workers first and learners second.

Maryland institutions already provide robust “meet and confer” mechanisms, enabling graduate students to regularly engage with university leaders on issues such as compensation, stipends, and working conditions. Proponents of bargaining argue that these forums have “toothless” outcomes, with repeated administrative dismissals. Thus, this past year we worked with elected graduate student government leaders to make the policy requirements on meet and confer more robust. This revised policy passed the USM Board of Regents at the December 2025 meeting. Legislation would displace these flexible channels with rigid bargaining units, undermining a collaborative culture cultivated on each campus. Mandating adversarial bargaining shifts the tone from collegial problem-solving to power-based negotiation.

Maryland’s public universities also maintain established grievance procedures that allow graduate students to escalate concerns about academic or employment matters confidentially. In contrast, collective bargaining introduces potential for public disputes, and union-mediated enforcement, injecting conflict into sensitive educational settings. These adversarial processes risk harming relationships and disrupting research continuity. While students do have legitimate concerns, the solution lies in enhancing existing grievance protocols—not replacing them with a

labor-centric model that could spark confrontations over academic and administrative impact.

Administrative burden and cost are also significant. Our universities would incur additional recurring personnel expenses and fees to dedicate staff to not only bargain any initial contract but to administer the ongoing bargaining relationship. This is separate and apart from expenses and fees related to any necessary use of outside counsel and fees for Public Employee Relations Board oversight. These costs have the potential to increase significantly given that the bill, in its current form, would allow these newly established units to elect to negotiate on a consolidated basis. Consolidated bargaining is a process that adds further complexity, and therefore cost, to the bargaining process, and is something we would argue is not proper for these units given the wide variability of programs and needs across the institutions.

Diverting funds to support bargaining infrastructure reduces resources available for stipends, research, and student services. Instead of allocating funds toward negotiating rather than mentoring, campus leaders should reinvest in existing support services and direct funding toward students.

The imposition of collective bargaining – in concert with the recent substantial disruptions in Federal funding of university research – can lead to a loss in opportunities for graduate students. For example, at Columbia’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences some doctoral candidates were relieved of teaching duties but will continue to receive their full salaries as fellowships. The graduate student union claims this was a union-busting technique. The University of Michigan (U-M), and many other universities, are experiencing PhD program disruptions. At Michigan, they are pausing admissions for the School of Public Health due to cuts to research funding and fellowship support.

Finally, many institutions already facilitate graduate student representation through shared governance bodies like Graduate Student Governments and advisory councils. These democratic forums preserve the academic mission and foster student voice without resorting to unionization. Enhancing and empowering existing student governance better upholds graduate students’ academic identity while addressing their concerns.

For all the foregoing reasons, the USM respectfully urges an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 84.

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\SB84_MorganStateUniversity_UNF

Uploaded by: David K. Wilson, President

Position: UNF



Office of the President

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

House Bill 141 (Delegate Foley)
Senate Bill 0084 (Senator Kramer, *et al.*)
Introduced during the 2025 Regular Session as SB0166
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Graduate Assistants

January 29, 2026

Unfavorable

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair, Finance Committee and Senator Antonio Hayes, Vice Chair, Finance Committee. We, at Morgan, thank you for the opportunity to share our position on House Bill 118. The summary of the Bill states the following: *Providing collective bargaining rights to certain graduate assistants at a system institution, Morgan State University, or St. Mary's College of Maryland; defining "graduate assistant" as a graduate student at a system institution, Morgan State University, or St. Mary's College of Maryland who is a teaching, administrative, or research assistant or in a comparable position, a fellow, or a postdoctoral intern; and establishing a separate collective bargaining unit for the graduate assistants.*

Morgan State University is the Preeminent Public Urban Research University in Maryland, known for its excellence in teaching, intensive research, effective public service and community engagement. Morgan prepares diverse and competitive graduates for success in a global interdependent society.

Background

Morgan is not opposed to collective bargaining in general. However, HB 141 and Senate Bill 84 will have a negative administrative and fiscal impact on our institution.

HB 141 and Senate Bill 84 [3-102, (b),(9), (iv-vi)] attempt to explicitly separate Graduate Assistants ("GA") from the list of public employment classes eligible for collective bargaining. If this legislation were to pass, GAs at Morgan State University could unionize and, subsequently, collectively bargain with the University. The University has substantial reservations about extending collective bargaining rights to GAs. Including GAs among the public workers eligible for collective bargaining will impose considerable strain on the University's financial resources and scholarly independence.

Morgan State already uses a renowned governance structure, which collective bargaining would only frustrate. Notably, Morgan's University Council provides a participatory system of governance, offering the University community opportunities for involvement, communication,

and accountability. University Council involves the administration, faculty, professional administrative staff, classified employees, and student body in the ongoing operation of the University. Three faculty members come from each of the University’s academic colleges and schools. 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 are from the University’s classified employees. The University Council reviews proposed policies and advises the University’s President concerning those policies, providing insight into the University-wide impact they may have. The University Council may also, on its own initiative, make recommendations for the President and the Board of Regents’ consideration with respect to any matter of University-wide significance and impact.

The University Council serves a valued role in providing all members of the University’s community a part in shared governance. Collective bargaining can lead to slower progress and hinder the implementation of initiatives that effectively address the concerns of multiple stakeholders, as the University Council has already accomplished.

Unique Duties and Funding Sources

Section 3-102 of the State Personnel and Pensions Article of the Maryland Code explicitly provides that contingent, contractual, and temporary employees are ineligible for collective bargaining. This legislation attempts to expand collective bargaining rights to GAs by specifically excluding them from that class of workers. Deliberately excluding GAs from this class is noteworthy because it implies that Graduate Assistants are equivalent to contingent, contractual, and temporary workers. While GAs share many of the same characteristics as contingent, contractual, and temporary employees, they have the unique distinction of working for a fixed term that naturally concludes upon the completion of their appointment or upon graduation.

Further, despite their common title, not all GAs share the same role.¹ In fact, graduate assistant appointments often reflect duties that are unique to specific curricular arrangements. For example, the responsibilities of GAs in the School of Social Work differ from those of their counterparts in the School of Architecture and Planning, which in turn differ from the School of Computer, Mathematical, & Natural Sciences, and so forth. Consequently, few GAs share common responsibilities.

These unique circumstances raise significant concerns about the effects of collective bargaining on the GAs across the University. For instance, it would be impractical for a single representative or small group of GAs to effectively advocate for the wide variety of duties that apply to specific GAs in the University’s twelve schools and colleges, let alone the different professors within each school or college. Moreover, it would be incredibly difficult for a single collective bargaining agreement to accommodate the range of interests, purposes, and programmatic nuances encompassed by different professors, schools, and colleges.

¹ *Morgan State University has two distinct graduate assistantships. Graduate Research Assistants work directly with faculty members on research and grant topics. Graduate Teaching Assistants teach undergraduate courses and assist faculty in the preparation of teaching materials.*

Limitations of Negotiating Future Employment Conditions

Graduate assistantships are typically nine-and-a-half-month appointments. Therefore, some GAs may complete their appointment or graduate before the conclusion of a negotiation period. This scenario raises concerns about the appropriateness of negotiating long-term conditions for roles defined by short-term, temporary engagement. For instance, a GA's participation in the bargaining process may be limited to their term, leading to an abrupt departure and the addition of a new, unfamiliar person to the bargaining table. This can undermine the continuity and consistency of representation during negotiations, hindering the ability to reach consensus on crucial topics and potentially leading to an impasse.

Academic Considerations

Morgan State University is committed to providing students with a world-class education. GAs play an important role in helping the University fulfill this commitment. However, expanding the University's labor obligations may lead to adverse consequences that could potentially jeopardize the University's mission. Professors and their GAs also currently enjoy a mentor-mentee relationship, and the professors at Morgan State University take great pride in serving as mentors for their GAs, particularly given the University's position as Maryland's Preeminent Public Urban Research University. This dynamic is special in our academic setting, as members of our student body often come to this University from unique urban backgrounds. The mentor-mentee relationship allows graduate assistants to learn directly from their professors in a cooperative, tailored manner. But collective bargaining threatens this dynamic. Instead, the relationship between a professor and GAs will morph into a supervisor-subordinate arrangement. The focus shifts from advancing the GA's academic achievements to prioritizing union interests, creating a tense learning environment for students. Further, Union rules for graduate assistants will inevitably restrict the autonomy GAs currently enjoy through course design, pedagogy, and assessment. Such an arrangement also puts the professor's academic freedom at risk. Morgan State University's ability to provide a world-class education is owed, in large part, to our professors' bringing their own styles, personalities, and course design to the classroom. Restrictions on that independence threaten the University's ability to provide that world-class education.

Financial Considerations

Morgan State University is a Carnegie Rank 2 Doctoral Research University. Despite a doubling in graduate student enrollment, the University's resources for graduate assistantships have only seen modest growth.

The University's goal is to provide competitive compensation while increasing the number of supported students. However, the financial impact of collective bargaining introduces uncertainties and additional costs. For student support alone, for every \$100 increase in stipends, the number of available assistantships will be reduced by 1 due to constraints of a fixed budget.

Morgan State University is proud to offer a world-class education at an affordable price. Morgan has managed to accommodate recent changes without significant disruption, but collective bargaining could jeopardize this balance by increasing costs and limiting flexibility. Reduced availability for funding GAs will negatively impact Morgan's efforts to improve its Carnegie status.

While every \$100 increase in stipends requires eliminating 1 assistantship, even if the University tried to maintain its current number of assistantships following this legislation, the University would very likely need to raise tuition to cover its financial obligation—a step the University does not want to take. But each additional financial obligation placed on the University requires funding from somewhere. When there are no more donors, grants, or external funding sources, the University is required to turn to tuition—i.e., students—to raise the funds needed to meet its obligations.

It is also unlikely that collective bargaining's effect on the University's financial obligations would be limited to the cost of the stipend and tuition waiver it pays its GAs (as evidenced by other public universities that have seen enhanced stipend amounts following unionization). Healthcare and other similar benefits are typically a major focus of collective bargaining. It is unclear whether the University's GAs would be classified as state employees and, therefore, covered by state benefits. Currently, the University offers a voluntary student health insurance plan. However, if this legislation were to become law and GAs were not classified as state employees, then the University could face significant financial constraints in establishing a healthcare program and, in turn, paying a portion of each GA's premium.

The University would also need to hire additional personnel to manage relations with this additional bargaining unit. These new employees would entail another significant added expense to the University. 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.

Agency infrastructure and staffing needed to support additional unionization efforts and activities are estimated to be approximately \$2M to 2.5M for Morgan. This estimated additional cost does not include any current benefits or related payments to individuals seeking to unionize. Further, this estimate of costs to support unionization would not include any additional negotiated cost, such as potential wage, benefits and miscellaneous payments, that are typically the subject of negotiation and would be contingent on additional funding provided by the State to meet any such agreed arrangements.

Conclusion

Graduate assistantships at Morgan State University provide professional experience and training tailored to individual goals and the University's funding and operational requirements. The diversity of duties, funding sources, and professional objectives complicates the feasibility of

collective bargaining. Moreover, the financial uncertainties introduced by collective agreements could undermine the University's efforts to expand support for its graduate students.

Morgan's focus on individualized training, programmatic nuance, and sustainable funding underscores the need for a tailored approach to employment terms, distinct from the collective bargaining framework. Morgan State University respectfully urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 0141/Senate Bill 0084.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with the State in reaching a solution to support our students as we continue to grow the future and lead the world.

Sincerely,



David K. Wilson
President, Morgan State University