



Testimony - HB 141, State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants  
Favorable

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

February 10, 2026

Christopher C. Cano, MPA

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

Honorable Chairwoman Wells & Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections 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. House Bill 141 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 House Bill 141 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 HB 141 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 House Bill 141, 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 House Bill 141. Thank you to Delegate Foley 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