

Dear Chair Wells and the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

It is critical and urgent that Maryland finally enact collective bargaining rights for graduate workers at the University System of Maryland. Graduate assistants are indispensable to the work of the university. They conduct groundbreaking research, teach class, mentor students, secure grant funding, and so much more. Their labor is critical to the mission of their institutions, and at institutions nationwide, the ability of graduate assistants to bargain collectively have made them better able to carry out those missions. Moreover, collective bargaining rights have helped attract top talent to institutions. Maryland is far behind comparable states and institutions of higher education in securing this fundamental workplace right for this vital workforce.

A sustained majority of graduate workers at UMD have signed and otherwise demonstrated support for forming a union with the 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. That being said, passage of this bill in no way pre-ordains an outcome of the organizing and collective bargaining process. Workers would still have to democratically choose to join their union, and then they would engage in a process of negotiating in good faith with their University to come to an agreement, on issues both economic and non-economic, that is suitable to both parties. We urge the House to reject amendments limiting the right to engage in this process to only a subset of workers, or that delay implementation for so long that today's workers are unlikely to see meaningful workplace protections in their time at the University.

For this reason, we would like to issue a favorable with amendments testimony for SB84. We support the cross-filed House Bill HB141 as passed by the House, and would like to see SB84 amended to match HB141. More specifically, our concerns with the amendments added by the Senate are as follows:

- 1) Striking "EXCEPT FOR A GRADUATE ASSISTANT" on page 4, line 28 functionally excludes most research assistants, as they are typically funded by a grant obtained by a faculty member.
 - a) Graduate assistants are already governed by the same policies and the same pay rates, regardless of where the funding for their position comes from. This amendment creates an artificial distinction where none currently exists, and would serve only to create a tiered workforce within the University System. Extending collective bargaining to all graduate assistants would simply make existing policies a subject of collective bargaining.
 - b) Many institutions already bargain over pay and working conditions for grant supported graduate assistants, including University of California, University of Washington, Rutgers, Johns Hopkins, University of Illinois, University of Connecticut, University of Massachusetts, University of Minnesota, University of Florida, University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Columbia, NYU, and more.

- c) Collective bargaining rights would not immediately put in place any particular contractual provisions for grant supported graduate assistants, but would simply extend the right for them to negotiate over what those provisions would be.
 - d) Under this amendment, the composition of the bargaining unit would be constantly in flux, as any individual graduate assistant's source of funding can change multiple times per year. It would be a bureaucratic nightmare for the university and the labor board to constantly track the source of graduate assistant funding to determine bargaining unit eligibility, and drawing such arbitrary lines would unnecessarily disrupt workers' career trajectories and their ability to protect themselves in the workplace
- 2) The implementation delay until 2028 on page 5, line 12 is completely unnecessary and delays this fundamental right at a time when it is urgently needed.
- a) Collective bargaining is a process which takes time. Even once workers have voted to join their union and the union has been certified (a process which would still have to play out following enactment of this bill), contracts between unions and employers take time to negotiate and ratify. First contracts in particular can take years to go into effect. An effective date of 2028 could result in graduate assistants waiting until at least 2030 for their first contract.
- 3) The change in the institutions on page 3, line 18 excludes graduate assistants at public institutions with no clear rationale. The graduate assistants at the excluded institutions do substantially similar work to the ones at UMD and UMBC.

We respectfully ask the committee to amend SB84 to remove the amendments sent over by the Senate.

Best,
Lydia Majure
International Representative
United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America