



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

Affiliated with the National AFL-CIO

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HB 141 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

February 10, 2026

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards

President

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 141. 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. HB 141 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 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.



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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. It is also important to note that employees at USM, Morgan State University, and the St. Mary's College of Maryland receive tuition reimbursement as part of their benefits as workers at these institutions. 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.

HB 141 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 HB 141.



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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

