



A BETTER UNIVERSITY IS POSSIBLE



20 September 2023

Dear Chancellor Perman, Members of the Board of Regents, and Presidents of the University System of Maryland Institutions:

We write as faculty, students, staff, and community members to urge you support campus workers in their effort to improve working conditions on our campuses. **Our working conditions are students learning conditions.**

**Opposition to worker demands from USM leaders is counterproductive and contrary to the USM's stated commitment to equity, inclusion and fairness.** USM leaders have testified against bills seeking to legalize collective bargaining for the university's academic workers. They needlessly draw out contract negotiations with the staff union. They circumvent curriculum decisions taken by faculty bodies. Leaders on the College Park campus refused to honor the Prince George's county's minimum wage. These measures create conflict where there should be cooperation.

**USM professors and graduate assistants lack a basic right to bargain collectively** afforded to USM staff, professors at Maryland's community colleges, and faculty and graduate students at esteemed peer institutions. Research indicates that universities that boast academic unions are more efficient and effective than non-unionized campuses. Montgomery College, long the only campus at which academic labor was unionized, is one of the most highly ranked institutions of its kind in the United States. Unions bolster the voices of those who interact daily with our students; they reinforce the mechanisms of faculty governance that have long sustained the excellence of US universities.

**Unionization helps recruit and retain students.** Our graduate stipends are currently well below the cost of living—at least \$11,000 below the cost of living on the UMD campus—and faculty find it difficult to recruit graduate students with stipends well below those of our competitors. Minimum stipends in UMD's Computer Science Department currently rank 27 out of 29 institutions nationally. These low stipends especially hamper our ability to **recruit and retain students from minority and underprivileged backgrounds** who bear a higher burden of student debt and cannot count on the financial support of family members. Low wages for undergraduate student workers also disproportionately affect minority and low-income students.

**Staff wages** on our campuses have lagged inflation since 2010. The System's continues to rely on **under-compensated contingent or contractual employees**, who do identical work as our "State" employees. These workers are exploited, having no rights and being compensated with substandard benefits as compared to their co-workers. Some employees remain contractual for years. All staff should be fairly compensated.

For all these reasons, we respectfully call on you to:

- Stop opposing worker organizing efforts, including legislation to enable collective bargaining. Stop using donor dollars to fund anti-democratic initiatives that stifle the collective voice of academic workers.
- Establish \$22/hour a minimum wage for undergraduate student workers, pegged to a cost-of-living indicator.
- Bargain in good faith with the representative of staff workers, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.
- Rein in the explosive growth in the number of administrators on our campuses and their mushrooming salaries.

Recognizing the organizations through which workers have chosen to express their collective demands, is the best way to honor the people who sustain the excellence of our universities.

Respectfully,

UMD Chapter of the American Association of University Professors  
Graduate Labor Union, United Auto Workers  
Local 1072, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees