Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Chairman Sanders,

We are writing on behalf of student governments at 25 universities representing over 180,000 students and researchers. We advocate for the right of graduate assistants (teaching assistants and research assistants) to be recognized as employees, form unions, and collectively bargain to improve their quality of life. We sincerely thank Chairman Sanders for his previous leadership on this issue through the Respect for Graduate Student Workers Act as well as Majority Leader Schumer for his vocal advocacy on this issue.

As the Senate seeks to pass measures protecting the right to organize in the upcoming reconciliation bill, we seek to ensure that the right of graduate assistants to unionize is included in this process.

The reasons why graduate assistants are employees and should have the right to unionize are clear:

- **Graduate assistants’ compensation are ‘consideration for work’ and not financial aid.** Graduate research and teaching assistants are compensated based on their duties as employees, not as financial aid for their economic circumstances.
- **The principal time commitment of graduate assistants is work as instructors or researchers.** After taking some classes during the first one or two years of graduate school, it is common for graduate assistants to not take any classes and function solely as a researcher. In the typical 4-7 year STEM PhD, as well as in non-STEM fields, a majority of a graduate assistant’s time is spent as a researcher or instructor.
- **Graduate assistants need the right to collectively bargain beyond their faculty supervisor.** Paid time off, health insurance, and teaching duties are often not dictated by a faculty mentor, but by the college or university. Any collective bargaining that a graduate assistant engages in is therefore not centered around one faculty member, but the institution as a whole.
- **The economic relationship between graduate assistants and universities.** This relationship includes intellectual property rights over student research (which generates economic value), as well as graduate teaching assistants, who are often the sole instructor for some courses and for many of whom teaching is not an educational requirement for their graduate programs.
- **Collective bargaining does not hurt academic freedom.** Graduate assistants should not be excluded from labor law protections based on unfounded assertions that collective bargaining will interfere with their academic freedom, as bargaining occurs between graduate assistants and university administration, not with individual faculty members.

**Congress should codify the right of graduate assistants to unionize into law:**

- Including language recognizing the right of graduate assistants to unionize will provide more certainty than the past alternating and conflicting rulings of the NLRB.
- This language would provide stability for graduate assistants to undertake unionization drives and contract negotiations at their universities to increase their quality of life.

We look forward to working with Congress to codify the right of graduate assistants at private universities to unionize into law. If you would like to know more about the role of graduate assistants in the research ecosystem and specific measures to improve graduate student quality of life, please reach out to us at gsc-eab-fed@mit.edu or gsa-vpea@andrew.cmu.edu.
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On behalf of:
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Carnegie Mellon University Graduate Student Assembly
Case Western Reserve University Graduate Student Council
Cleveland State University Graduate Professional Student Association
California State University, Bakersfield, Graduate Student Center
Fordham University Graduate Student Association
John Jay College of Criminal Justice Student Council
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate Student Council
New York University Student Government Assembly
Northwestern University Chicago Graduate Student Association
Portland State University Graduate Employees Union
Rutgers University Graduate Student Organization
Stanford University Graduate Student Council, Undergraduate Senate of the Associated Students, and Postdoctoral Association
Stony Brook University Graduate Student Organization
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