

Opposition to HB 4497 and SB 185

My name is Steve Delie, and I am the Director of Labor Policy at the Mackinac Center. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and educational institute that advances the principles of free markets and limited government. Through our programs, we challenge government overreach and advance free-market approaches to public policy that frees people to realize their potential and dreams. I write today to oppose HB 4497 and SB 185.

HB 4497 and SB 185

Both HB 4497 and SB 185 represent an expansion of the employees that fall within the jurisdiction of Michigan's Public Employment Relations Act, PA 336 of 1947. Specifically, these bills would amend PERA to allow graduate student research assistants to be classified as public employees. This, in turn, would allow them to be unionized under the terms of PERA.

Classifying graduate student research assistants as public employees risks significant disruption to both Michigan's ability to educate college students, and to serve as innovator in areas of important scientific research. Graduate student research assistants are, appropriately, engaged in academic research in order to assist professors. Their primary role is to advance academic research, rather than perform duties more traditionally consistent with an employment relationship. By classifying research assistants as public employees, SB 185 and HB 4497 inherently create an adversarial relationship between professors and their assistants. Should labor disputes arise, the disruption would not just be to professors engaged in research--graduate student research assistants would also have their education negatively affected due to the disruption to their own research.

In 2011, this opinion was largely shared by 19 members of the University of Michigan's faculty. On June 24, 2011, these professors wrote a letter to former Provost Philip Hanlon opposing the unionization of graduate student research assistants. This letter outlined not only the potential disruption to research that benefitted both Michigan and the nation as a whole, but also stressed "the potential negative impact on [professors'] one-on-one relationships with students and the University's competitive position among its peers." The letter also acknowledged that unionization would "compromise the essential nature of the doctoral preparation."¹

Conclusion

These bills do not benefit graduate student research assistants or the state of Michigan. HB 4497 and SB 185 jeopardize important research interests, as well as the education of graduate students. For these reasons, we urge you to vote no on both bills.

¹ A copy of this letter is attached.



UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48109-1340

Received

JUN 24 2011



June 24, 2011

*Confidential
By Hand Delivery*

Provost Philip Hanlon
3074 Fleming Building
503 Thompson Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1340

Dear Phil:

We write to express our deep and collective concern about the potential negative impacts that would result from unionization of the University's graduate student research assistants (GSRA). We believe that such a union would put at risk the excellence of our university and the success of our graduate student research assistants.

Research assistantships provide graduate students with opportunities to develop their research skills while working in a lab or on a project under faculty supervision. As students assist with various aspects of scholarly work, they gain in their capacity for independent research. This is an important part of their academic training. A union would be a third party intervening in the educational program, in the middle between faculty mentors and their students. This would compromise the essential nature of doctoral preparation.

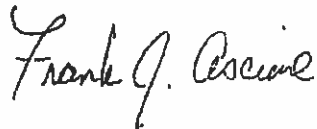
We note that graduate student research assistants are not unionized at the peer institutions against whom the University competes for faculty and graduate students. The Board of Regents in their public statement at the June 16, 2011 meeting included a list of other public institutions at which research assistants are unionized; although they are fine institutions, none of them competes in research at the same level as Michigan. It would be a great loss to the state and the nation if our research efforts were to decline to the quality seen at lesser universities. We worry that a GSRA union would make Michigan an outlier when the best and brightest graduate students compare research opportunities, and when we work to recruit excellent research faculty. A vast majority of the faculty members with whom we have spoken do not support GSRA unionization because of the potential negative impact on their one-on-one relationships with students and the University's competitive position among its peers.

We want to make it clear that we respect the Board of Regents' decision to move to an election, and we are fully committed to a fair and open election process. To ensure a fair and open election process, careful thought must be given to the composition of the bargaining unit, and students must be encouraged to educate themselves on the issues related to unionization

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and to participate in the election. We must give faculty and the administration the time and opportunity to state their positions to members of the bargaining unit. It will take time for GSRAs to hear both sides of the story and to educate themselves on the issues, and so it is crucial that there be a reasonable time period before an election. It is also crucial that the election take place during a regular (fall or winter) semester so that all GSRAs are in residence and have an equal and fair opportunity to be informed and to participate in the election. We ask that the university leadership do whatever it can in working with the AFT to ensure a fair and open election within a carefully designed bargaining unit.

Yours truly,



Frank J. Ascione
Dean and Professor of Social and Administrative Sciences
College of Pharmacy



Deborah Loewenberg Ball
Dean, School of Education
William H. Payne Collegiate Professor
Arthur F. Thurman Professor

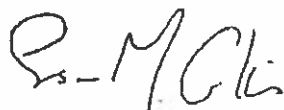


Rosina M. Bierbaum
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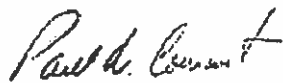
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Law School



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Joan and Sanford Weill Dean of Public Policy
Professor of Public Policy and Economics
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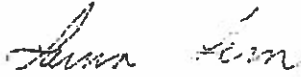


Paul N. Courant
Harold T. Shapiro Collegiate Professor of Public Policy,
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor
University Librarian & Dean of Libraries

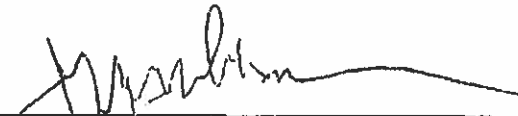


Robert J. Dolan
Edward J. Frey Dean
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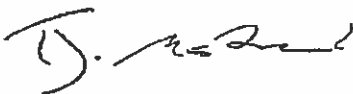
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Dean, and Katherine Reebel Collegiate Professor of Social Work
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School of Social Work



Jeffrey K. MacKie-Mason
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Arthur W. Burks Collegiate Professor of Information and Computer Science
Professor of Economics and Public Policy



Terrence J. McDonald
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor,
Professor of History, and Dean
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts



David C. Munson, Jr.
Robert J. Vlasic Dean of Engineering,
Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science,
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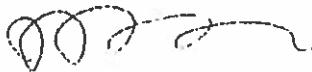
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Professor of Dentistry and Dean
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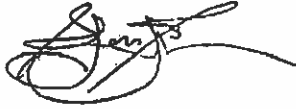


Monica Ponce de Leon
Eliel Saarinen Collegiate Professor of Architecture,
Professor of Architecture and Urban Planning and Dean,
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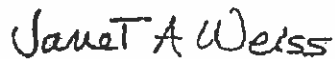


Kathleen Potempa, PhD, RN, FAAN
Dean and Professor
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