

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

November 8, 2023

President Suresh Garimella
Office of the President
University of Vermont
85 South Prospect Street
Burlington, VT 05405

Dear President Garimella:

As you know, nearly 650 graduate student workers at the University of Vermont are attempting to form a union and win a seat at the bargaining table. As I'm sure you also know, what is taking place at UVM is not unique. Graduate students all across the country have, over the last few years, voted to organize and a number of them have signed contracts with their universities.

In my view, it is more than appropriate that graduate students exercise their constitutional right to organize and achieve long needed improvements to stipends, benefits, and working conditions.

For far too long, the trend in our higher education system has been going in the wrong direction: student workers are required to work longer hours for lower pay with weaker job security, all while taking on more and more debt. Too many graduate student workers have to take on two or even three jobs just to get by. In my view, stronger unions and worker protections are a key part of solving this crisis in our colleges and universities.

To date, the University of Vermont is no exception to this national trend of taking advantage of student workers. These workers play a critical role in the financial success of the university and academic achievements of its student body. They are relied upon to conduct research, teach courses, and provide other essential work, all while maintaining a full course load. With minimum 12-month stipends of just \$27,850 for Master's student workers and \$32,000 for PhD student workers, it is no surprise that they have moved to stand together to demand better. The reality is that organizing their union is the best way for them to ensure that their voices are not only heard, but are enshrined in a fair, legally binding contract, so that they no longer need to worry about making rent or knowing how they will complete their education.

My request of you is to remain neutral throughout this process and ensure that these workers, who dedicate each day to the mission of the University, are able organize together free of any attempts to disrupt, delay, or otherwise hinder the election process. Now is the time for the University of Vermont to show up for its people, rather than stand against them.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS

CC: UVM Board of Trustees