

Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy, Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives Melissa Hortman, Chairs of the People of Color and Indigenous (POCI) Caucus Reps. Cedric Frazier and Esther Agbage, and other members of the State Legislature,

We are writing to express our strong support for HF 4508 / SF 4597, which would modify the current public employee definition to allow all undergraduate student workers at the University of Minnesota to form and join labor unions. Currently, students who receive financial aid or participate in work study programs are not considered by PELRA to be public employees. Therefore, they are not allowed to organize unions or collectively bargain. Whereas a student who is lucky enough to not need financial aid can improve their working conditions through unionization, the majority who lack access to those resources cannot.

The current PELRA language harms the most vulnerable students on our campuses. Student workers on financial aid have no avenue to fight for equality or labor protections in their workplaces. This disproportionately affects students of color and students from marginalized identities on the UMN campuses. A 2019 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic undergraduate students are more likely to receive grants of financial aid and work study than their peers¹. Similar patterns can be found in the percentages of undergraduate students who received Pell grants¹. International students - who cannot work off campus because of their immigration status - are also forced to work university jobs through financial aid programs. PELRA was written to expand labor rights for all public employees in Minnesota, but in practice it has been discriminatory and biased against student workers from these diverse backgrounds.

Undergraduate students on financial aid and work study need to work to further their education, but have no union protections against discrimination or conflict in the workplace. Student workers who have experienced discrimination in the workplace often feel reluctant to report these incidents due to the vulnerable position they hold. Low wages and caps on the number of hours for student worker positions have also caused financial hardship and hunger within the undergraduate population on UMN's campuses. Because of these reasons and more, undergraduates across the United States are organizing student worker unions. Recently, student workers at the University of Oregon as well as the California State system voted to unionize. Here in the Twin Cities, Macalester College students have also been working towards forming their own undergraduate worker union.

As student groups and governments representing thousands of undergraduates, we support changes to PELRA that would recognize students on financial aid or work study as public employees and allow them to form and join labor unions. The Undergraduate Student

¹ SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics. (2019, February). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*. Indicator 22: Financial aid.

Government (USG) on the UMN Twin Cities campus has already passed a resolution in support of HF 4508 and SF 4597. Similar resolutions are moving through the other campus governments. We urge you to help us address this glaring inequity in our state's labor law.

SIGNED:

Undergraduate Student Government - Twin Cities
Black Motivated Women (UMN Twin Cities)
Feminist Student Activist Collective (UMN Twin Cities)
Students for Climate Justice (UMN Twin Cities)
Mi Gente Latinx Student Cultural Center (UMN Twin Cities)
American Indian Student Cultural Center (UMN Twin Cities)
Queer Student Cultural Center (UMN Twin Cities)
Minnesota International Student Association (UMN Twin Cities)
Asian Student Union (UMN Twin Cities)
Multiracial Student Union (UMN Twin Cities)