

*February 27, 2007
R.B 7264*

Honorable Chairs, Members of the committee:

My name is Edward Marth; I am Executive Director of the University of Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

We support Bill 7264, which would enable Graduate Assistants to bargain collectively.

Graduate Assistants are vital to the health of the University's research program. They come to UCONN to learn, but they also are eagerly sought by other institutions as participants in the research endeavor. While their costs are often partially underwritten by research grants, they also engage in teaching.

UCONN has admitted a host of added students for the revenue and to make good on the promise of UCONN 2000. The University has not been able to add to the faculty in adequate numbers, so the institution has had to rely more and more on teaching by graduate students and adjuncts; something that neither the undergraduates nor the legislature envisioned when the commitment to UCONN 2000 was made. Graduate assistants, like the full time faculty, are over stretched, and adjuncts are relied on too much as well to deliver the added classes.

Until recent years, graduate assistants were covered by the state employee health plan, something similar to competing institutions. They were written out of the plan with no notice, and the University had to go out to bid for a smaller plan which delivers less benefit at dubious savings.

If the graduate assistants were to be re-included in the health plan it would relieve pressure on the need to organize; if they could be guaranteed on admission that the terms of coverage would not change on the winds of the next budget crisis they would be better off as well. Such things do not happen to the weakest among us; they will receive the shorter end of the economic stick, which is why we support their right to organize and bargain collectively.