



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

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**Public Hearing Testimony  
Labor and Public Employees Committee  
Kim Armstrong - UCONN Graduate Assistant and Member of UAW GEU Local 6950  
HB6874 and HB6876 - Support  
March 5, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Kim Armstrong. I am a graduate assistant (GA) at the University of Connecticut (UConn) in the English department and a member of UAW Graduate Employee Union Local 6950.

On behalf of 2,200 UConn graduate teaching and research assistants I am here to express support for HB 6874 An Act Concerning Graduate Assistant Benefits and HB 6876 An Act Concerning Public Institutions of Higher Education and Collective Bargaining Agreements. With this testimony I am presenting the committee with a substitute bill for HB 6874 that requires that the group insurance paid for by UConn for GAs (subject of course to collectively bargained premium shares) be procured through the Comptroller's Partnership Plan, and to give the Comptroller the formal authority/obligation to allow UConn to purchase the group insurance in that manner.

We are here today because as graduate assistants, we are students but also employees, which puts us in difficult and unusual positions with regard to the benefits and protections we receive from UConn.

UConn's GAs average annual salary is between \$18,000 and \$20,000 annually. Because the University also views GAs as students, the University charges GAs over \$2,200 in non-healthcare related fees that have to be paid back to UConn. For the average GA, this is 11% of their salary, however some GAs are paid as little as \$10,000 a year and still have to pay \$2,200 in fees. This is one of the highest student fee burdens in the US.

Our healthcare benefits also put a substantial burden on us. In 2003, GAs were taken out of the state employee health plan and their healthcare was taken over by UConn. Since then, out-of-pocket costs have increased and become prohibitive, while the quality of care and number of providers has decreased.

These cuts in overall GA compensation hurt UConn in quality and competitiveness. Unpredictable and declining overall compensation and benefits undermine GAs' ability to focus on the quality teaching and research that will make UConn continue to grow as an academic powerhouse, as well as its ability to recruit the best and brightest.

HB 6874 will relieve some of the financial burden that GAs face so that we can continue to provide instruction that enables affordable, quality education for tens of thousands of students from our state's working families and carry out innovative projects for faculty that help bring \$150 million to UConn and our state in the form of research grants and contracts.

The second bill, HB 6876 ACC Public Institutions of Higher Education and Collective Bargaining Agreements, also provides increased protection for GAs. When faced with sexual harassment or other forms of illegal discrimination as either an employee or a student, GAs are particularly vulnerable since often the same person controls both their employment and academic futures.

Currently, UConn is seeking to limit GAs choices when discriminated against by only allowing GAs to pursue a course of action under their contract or through the CHRO or other court.

I urge the committee to support this bill that will make it possible for GAs who have faced discrimination to have all options for recourse available to them.

In a situation where the leaders of our state and our University system are trying to marshal every weapon to make it easier and safer to fight discrimination, the General Assembly should insist that the University allow options to remain open to victims.

**Please allow UConn to grow as a premiere research institution in the state and in the country by supporting the GAs with these bills.**

Thank you.

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