

March 4, 2024

Sen. Omar Fateh, Chair
Sen. Aric Putnam, Vice Chair
Senate Higher Education Committee

Chair Fateh, Vice Chair Putnam, and Members of the Higher Education Committee,

I am an undergraduate student worker on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus, specifically with the Office of the Registrar. I am also a student who receives federal financial aid and work-study funds. My rights as a student worker are extremely limited due to the current PELRA legislation that is in place. I highly support SF 4597 in modifying the current public employee definition to allow all undergraduate students to join and form common sense unions.

As a student who is disallowed from joining and participating in bargaining due to my financial need to attend college, my rights to collective bargaining are denied. I am unable to join my full-time non-student coworkers and supervisors in the clerical workers' union who represent us and provide benefits that we are unable to receive. This is the case for a large majority of undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota due to the current, unmodified legislation in place. SF 4597 would allow for us to regain the rights we do not currently have. No student should have less rights than any other student due to financial need for aid.

Undergraduate student workers are essential to all University of Minnesota campuses, and we should be able to advocate for ourselves within the unions that represent our various positions across the state. We deserve the same rights and opportunities as any staff at the University who are included under PELRA. The changes we ask for within SF 4597 are not radical, and place the University in line with widely accepted norms for unionization in the public and private sectors. We all are public employees, no matter if we receive federal aid or work study, no matter our position or what campus we attend.

Please consider passing this bill with all proposed modifications. The benefits that undergraduate students receive from common unions, as well as returning our right to collective bargaining, will provide student workers with the protections we have been excluded from.

Thank you.

Ash Smith, UMN Undergrad Student Worker
Minneapolis, MN