

March 7, 2024

Chair Fateh and Members of the Higher Education Committee,

As a Political Science lecturer and former graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I am writing to ask for your support for SF 4597 and the much needed amendments it makes to the Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA).

Lecturers and other 'gig professors'¹ at the U of M teach despite inadequate working conditions that also negatively affect our students' learning². If I were an instructor at a different institution--or a public or private employee almost anywhere else in the US--I would be able to talk to my co-workers facing similar conditions and attempt to form a union. However, this isn't possible because of PELRA's rare and perplexing system of mandatory bargaining units. Due to those units, I would need to organize thousands of employees whose jobs look nothing like mine and who may work on the other side of the state.

An IT specialist can't understand the difficulty of teaching sensitive subjects without academic freedom protections. Marketing employees from Crookston don't have to fight for library access prior to the term to make their syllabi. Advancement officers from Morris don't get dropped after each semester ends. Administrative specialists at Rochester don't have their pay fluctuate with the number of courses available. Conversely, I don't have much in common with the working conditions of these employees. Yet PELRA forces us into the same bargaining unit.

The current PELRA system is a radical outlier in private and public sector labor relations. This bill would return us to normalcy by aligning PELRA with widely accepted practices in both the private and public sectors, as well as in higher education institutions across the country. University of Minnesota workers deserve the same union rights as other public employees.

I urge you to stand with University of Minnesota workers and support these proposed amendments to PELRA. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Tracey Blasenheim
Political Science Lecturer
University of Minnesota

¹ "Your Professor May Be a Gig Worker"

<https://mndaily.com/274370/opinion/opinion-your-professor-may-be-a-gig-worker/>

² "Revising the adjunct faculty system: The adjunct system is hurting students and faculty alike."

<https://mndaily.com/281699/opinion/opinion-revising-the-adjunct-faculty-system/>