

WORKING FOR A BETTER UCONN

UCONN Graduate Employee Union
United Auto Workers, Local 6950
1734 Storrs Rd. Storrs, CT 06268



Dear Congressman Courtney,

The Graduate Employee Union, United Auto Workers Local 6950 at the University of Connecticut, urges you to oppose any tax bill that eliminates the tuition waiver provision that allows graduate student employees to afford their education.

The tax bill currently moving through Congress erodes support for graduate students, colleges and universities, in addition to threatening tax fairness. The House Republican tax plan (HR 1) would more than double most graduate student employees' taxable income by removing the exemption on tuition waivers. This creates an inflated tax bill that we as graduate employees cannot afford on our stipends as graduate assistants.

The elimination of the tax exemption for tuition waivers is one more example of how the Trump/GOP tax bill hurts working people, students, and our institutions of higher education. This tax exemption, which has existed for years with consistent university support, is sound policy that enhances accessibility, inclusiveness, and excellence in teaching and research at our great institutions of higher education. It enhances access by enabling tens of thousands of graduate students to afford to pursue post-bachelor degrees as we provide critical services advancing the frontiers of science and critical face to face teaching.

Tuition waivers also encourage inclusiveness and excellence by enabling universities to recruit the best and brightest from around the nation and globe, regardless of background or economic means to study, to both teach and do research. If graduate tuition waivers were taxed, in-state graduate student employees at the University of Connecticut, for example, could be taxed on an additional \$16,000 of income (and that amount increases to \$35,000 for out-of-state and international students) while receiving the same income they currently make. This bill would particularly impact international GAs more as they pay non-resident tuition throughout their work here and are legally barred from seeking additional employment beyond the university to supplement their modest incomes. That number increases for graduate student employees at private institutions with higher tuition. It is deeply disturbing that Trump and his supporters would try to eliminate this longstanding exemption, calling it a "tax cut" when in fact it is just one more attack on our universities and working people more generally. We need to strongly oppose any change to this important component of our system of higher education.

This would simply put graduate school out of reach for all but the wealthiest students, and would significantly harm our institutions' missions of providing high quality undergraduate education and world-class research. Even with a graduate assistantship and tuition waiver, too many graduate employees are forced to go into debt to do this important work and obtain a graduate degree.

Support graduate students, colleges and universities, and tax fairness – oppose any tax plan that eliminates the tuition waiver provision for graduate student employees and that cuts other education benefits.

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