



On February 17, 2017, Governor Branstad signed House File 291 into law, significantly limiting the collective bargaining power of Iowa unions. Despite opposition from constituents, legislators pushed this bill forward, thereby limiting considerations of the law's impact on Iowa workers, as well as COGS's ability to negotiate on behalf of graduate students. In response to this legislation, the Iowa Board of Regents (BOR) drew out the bargaining process and redrafted their contract proposals, eliminating our rights to a safe workplace environment, grievance process, non-discrimination clause protections, and number of hours worked, among many others that COGS has fought for twenty years to secure. This law makes it more difficult for the University of Iowa graduate student community to maintain a union and subsequently to advocate for competitive compensation packages for current and prospective graduate students. The BOR's proposal only included the single required issue of base salary, to which they have proposed a 1.1% increase—half the current rate of inflation in the United States. The timing of this bill's passing and the BOR's actions once it was signed into law suggest that they bargained with COGS in bad faith, and that they were waiting for legislators to rush this bill through the legislative process. This sends the message to graduate students that the BOR is only willing to discuss compensation so long as they are legally obligated to do so.

We, the Graduate Student Senate, want to publicly state our opposition to such pointed legislation, and to the BOR's use of this law to diminish the position of graduate students at the University of Iowa. The work we do not only facilitates increased teaching capacity and undergraduate education quality, but also enables faculty to conduct world-class research, both directly and indirectly. Therefore, having competitive graduate compensation packages and work conditions significantly affects the reputation and function of the University. The actions taken by the BOR, while ostensibly trying to reduce costs, harm the University and the people who work and research here. Because of the proposed cuts, talented students will choose to go elsewhere for their graduate education, and current graduate student retention rates will drop. This will, in turn, negatively affect the research and teaching mission of the University of Iowa.

We wish to thank Dean Keller and the rest of the Graduate College, as well as the faculty, for their support. Faculty understand how crucial graduate students are to their own research, as evidenced by their statement of support for graduate students this past month. Dean Keller and the Graduate College's pledge to provide tuition, health insurance, and lower fees demonstrates that they recognize the necessity for these factors for Iowa's graduate students. The Graduate College understands that a well-supported graduate student body contributes to the academic rigor of this institution. We strongly encourage the Graduate College to continue to fight for graduate students, and to enact meaningful and binding policy at the University of Iowa that will protect graduate students and ensure our ongoing access to health care, safe working conditions, and competitive compensation.