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California State Senate

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NINTH SENATE DISTRICT



CHAIR
BUDGET & FISCAL REVIEW
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET

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October 14, 2021

Michael Drake, President
University of California
Office of the President
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607

RE: Student Researchers United-UAW Recognition

Dear President Drake,

I am writing to urge you to recognize Student Researchers United--UAW as the union chosen by the majority of 17,000 UC Student Researchers. The University of California's premier research and its securing of more research funding and more patents than any other university in the nation would not be possible without the contributions of the University's 17,000 Student Researchers.

Student Researchers are essential drivers of UC's research mission. They perform experiments, write and collaborate on research grant proposals, and generate creative ideas that push the boundaries of their fields.

Despite their enormous contributions to the University of California, Student Researchers face persistent inequalities in the workplace, including low wages, long hours, and at times workplace harassment and discrimination, all of which detract from Student Researchers' ability to perform their timely and groundbreaking duties. The workplace issues confronting these student researchers is why a majority of them (over 12,000) submitted authorization cards to the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) in May choosing to form a union, Student Researchers United-UAW. PERB verified this majority and the right of the union to be recognized in early August.

The legislature passed SB 201 in 2017 to recognize the full employment rights of all Student Researchers at the University of California. SB 201 corrected a decades-long disparity that UC Student Researchers did not have the right under the Higher Education Employer-Employee Relations Act (HEERA) to form a union because they were considered students, not employees. With the passage and signing of SB 201, the California Legislature and Governor joined in correcting this disparity and extending collective bargaining rights to all UC Student Researchers.

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It is my understanding that the University has disputed the composition of the bargaining unit, arguing that workers in certain job titles are students and not workers, and as such is denying recognition of the new union. I encourage you to ameliorate this circumstance and recognize Student Researchers United-UAW as the union for Student Researchers in all the titles in which the student researchers work.

I respectfully urge you to ensure that the University of California systemwide respects the rights and democratic decision of these UC employees, and begin the task of negotiating a contract that fairly recognizes and reflects the needs of both parties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Skinner".

Nancy Skinner
California State Senator, SD-09

CC: Michael Brown, Provost & Executive Vice President