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Union Investigates ISU Attempt to Block Orientations

Bloomington, IL – SEIU Local 73, the union representing ISU Graduate Workers, is investigating the university’s attempt to block orientations with the Graduate Teaching Assistants.

“It’s bad enough ISU treats us like indentured servants. Now, they’re attempting to avoid their legal obligation to allow our union to speak with grad workers,” said Steven Lazaroff, graduate teaching assistant.

Graduate Teaching Assistants, many of whom are paid so little they must regularly visit the campus food pantry, have been fighting for a union contract ever since first forming their union in late 2018. Graduate workers teach hundreds of classes for ISU, prepare and grade tests, conduct labs, and bring in millions of dollars in student tuition and research grants, yet receive some of the lowest pay for their jobs among institutions considered comparable to ISU. They are also required to pay student fees even when not taking any classes themselves, and these fees sometimes effectively wipe out a graduate worker’s pay for months at a time.

ISU Administrators continue to refuse to waive these exorbitant fees as part of the contract.

In April, the ISU Graduate Workers Union held a strike authorization vote resulting in a 98% YES from union members. As a result, the bargaining committee has been authorized to call for a strike vote which could lead to a strike by Graduate Teaching Assistants in the future should ISU fail to bargain in good faith with union members.

“Our goal is not to strike, but to get a quality, fair contract for the workers who keep this university running. No one wants to strike, but if ISU continues to commit these violations of state law and we aren’t able to

reach an agreement, they will leave us no other option,” said Darcy Allred, graduate teaching assistant.

While ISU legal counsel has recognized the union’s legal right to hold orientations, ISU officials have refused to allow any orientations to take place as per state law. SEIU Local 73 intends to file unfair labor practice charges should ISU continue refusing to allow for orientations on work time with graduate workers.

Bargaining was forced to stop due to the summer break as Graduate Teaching Assistants are forced to find other jobs outside of ISU to support themselves. Bargaining is expected to resume at the end of August with a federal mediator.

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SEIU Local 73 represents more than 29,000 workers, primarily in public service and publicly funded positions in school districts, municipalities, social service agencies, and many other job classifications in Illinois and Indiana. We are dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families.