Anais Surkin to UMass Trustees

September 17, 2014

I’m Anais Surkin....co-chair GEO, doctoral student in SJE... representing UAW Local 2322 which represents GEO, PRO, RAU & 15 other shops in the valley and VT representing over 3,000 workers. Currently GEO is in negotiations and I come here today to address the UMass Board of Trustees to gain the respect that workers in our union deserve. We are instructors, researchers, residence life workers, project assistants. UMass works because we all do. Though I come from UMass Amherst, I stand together with GEO members at Lowell & Boston who are also bargaining and do not even have parity with us. UMass Amherst works because all 2,500 graduate student employees spend countless hours inside classrooms, in the field doing research, bringing in large grants to the university and raising the prestige of the university. In return we do not ask for exorbitant praise, rather fair compensation which means a living wage, health benefits that actually benefit us and our families, as well as a say in our working conditions. Who knows better what we need than those of us who are actually on the ground doing the hard work that makes our University great?

We have been at the table for weeks now and are here to demand the respect and ear that we deserve. We stand here with the other campus unions because our struggle is the same as theirs. Although it may look different, although our concessions are masked and more covert, our struggle for respect, dignity and a fair contract is the same. Our University has a wonderful history of and reputation for democratic education and as a center for social justice and in order to live up to this promise, it be hooves the University to treat all workers with respect and bargain in good faith. Our members are angry and we refuse to be pitted against one another and we refuse to have economic demands held hostage to contract language and working conditions. GEO members are deeply committed to the success of UMass and all members of the UMass community, which is in ALL of our best interest and we will continue to fight for the best University for ALL in our campaign to settle a truly fair contract as soon as possible.