

Michigan Bill Prohibiting Grad Students From Unionizing Passes House

March 5, 2012 | [Labor And Employment](#)

Organizing Michigan graduate student research assistants (known as GSRAs) were struck a blow recently after the [state House passed a bill](#) aimed at prohibiting the students from unionizing. [SB 971](#) amended Michigan's Public Employment Relations Act (PERA) to specifically exclude GSRAs from the definition of "public employees" for the purposes of unionization. The bill passed the Michigan House by a 62-45 vote on March 1. The bill had previously been passed by the Senate in February. It must be signed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder before it can take effect.

The bill was introduced as a direct reaction to the efforts of University of Michigan GSRAs to unionize. That effort was already hindered by litigation in front of the Michigan Employee Relations Commission (MERC), which issued a ruling last year finding that the GSRAs were not public employees. MERC granted the GSRAs' motion for reconsideration of that decision and the final decision is currently pending. But passage of SB 971 will likely make that case moot.

The NLRB has dealt with a similar issue with private universities in the past, first finding that GSRAs could unionize in [New York University](#), decided in 2000, and then reversing this decision four years later in [Brown University](#). A [petition is currently pending](#) by NYU students seeking to overturn *Brown* but it is unclear when the Board will issue a decision.

See also:

[Bill aimed at keeping Michigan grad students from unionizing passes House](#) (Michigan Radio)

[State House passes bill to keep grad students from unionizing](#) (*Detroit Free Press*)

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