

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 658
Supporting

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

As a PhD candidate in history and University of Maryland teaching assistant, I am writing in support of SB 658. When I first entered the history department at the University of Maryland three years ago, I was caught off guard by the poor working conditions of graduate workers. While our work makes the University of Maryland a top institution of higher learning and ensures that students achieve positive learning outcomes, we are not recognized as workers and are limited in exercising our rights. The current system is unsustainable and is driving talented teachers and scholars away from the University.

We work far more hours than we are contractually obligated to and receive poverty-level wages in return. Many people have to moonlight in outside jobs, or overload their hours at the University to the detriment of their research to meet the high cost of living in the Baltimore-Washington Metro area. While our contracts limit our hours to 20 a week, I have personally worked 50-60 hours in certain points in the semester, between leading discussion sections for over 70 students, grading exams and papers, and responding to student inquiries and meeting requests. I also regularly take on outside work to make ends meet.

Currently, at UMD we have no grievance procedure, no recourse to an HR department, no ability to take sick days, and no say in the terms of our employment. At a time when there is increasing attention on equality in the workplace, it is shameful that the University of Maryland system would allow this state of affairs to persist.

With this bill, we are asking for the same right to collectively bargain as other workers. We need to meet with the administration on equal footing to improve conditions. I urge you to vote to legally recognize graduate student employees' right to choose to collectively bargain. By recognizing the voices of graduate workers, assistant-supervisor relationships, teaching performance, and research would improve to the benefit of the entire student body.

Sincerely,

Charlie Fanning
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