

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,

I urge you to support this legislation which grants collective bargaining rights to graduate employees at institutions of higher education in Maryland. I strongly contend that our labor should be valued as it would be in any other context. Our current situation leaves us without any concrete leverage with which to advocate for ourselves.

I am entering my fourth semester as a Teaching Assistant at UMCP. So far, my experience has been mostly positive, though I am aware of many troubling issues put forth by colleagues in my department and in other departments. I support this bill because I believe it is immoral to deny the right of collective bargaining to working people, whether or not they happen to be students, and because negotiations with administrators have largely failed to adequately address the well-established issues that have been raised in the past by the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC). I have witnessed firsthand the evasiveness and indifference that administrators have shown towards these issues in meetings with GAAC representatives.

As for specific issues, the wages currently received by graduate student workers do not support even the most modest lifestyle in the DC/College Park area. As a personal example, in 2019, the difference between my monthly paycheck and my monthly rent payment was \$90.10. This means that 90% of my paycheck went to rent, leaving me \$90.10 for transportation, food, tuition payments, mandatory fees, medical expenses, and other necessities. I do not need to tell you that that is not enough; even if I worked twice the hours I currently do, I would barely be scraping by. While I have been living on external limited financial resources, many of my colleagues must take outside work in order to supplement their graduate assistant income, while struggling to meet the demands of a full time graduate-level course load. Most students are not as fortunate as I am; some are supporting families on incomes like this, and many more are in debt. It is unacceptable that we do not have the power to change these circumstances.

We know that administrators are invested in our success, because it is our success which defines the University. However, the only leverage we have right now is the empathy of our faculty and administration in hearing our concerns. Though this may occasionally produce a better working environment for us, it is unacceptable for us to not have the right to advocate for representation should we ever feel the need to. Granting student workers like us the right to collectively bargain would serve as a first step in recognizing the contributions we make to Maryland's institutions.

Please support the long-overdue passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

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