

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 write today urging you to support SB 658, which would provide graduate students at the University of Maryland (UMD) the right to organize and choose to collectively bargain. As per my graduate teaching assistantship contract for this academic year, I am making \$18,979 over the term of my appointment – well below the estimated annual cost of living in the region.

My colleagues and I, having given up well-paying positions in the outside world to bring our passion and talents to research and teaching at this university, are being overworked and underpaid. We have no grievance procedure, no HR channels through which to work, and no recourse to address basic inequalities, like an inability to take sick days or to refuse requests from supervisors and administrators for fear refusal would lead to punitive measures, including the loss of our funding. Those of us who are parents experience additional stress in trying to support our families on a meager income while trying to negotiate sick days not only for ourselves, but also so that we might care for our children during their illnesses.

Graduate students' work at the university suffers due to our inability to produce good outcomes when trying to keep up with unrealistic assigned workloads to the detriment of our teaching, personal research, and quality of life. Additionally, we are continuously stressed over our financial situation. These conditions create ripple effects, impacting undergraduate student learning and research outcomes across the university.

I urge lawmakers to support SB 658, with the knowledge that improving conditions for graduate students will improve the overall quality of academics and research across the university. Improving conditions for graduate students will also make graduate programs at UMD more attractive to future students, raising the overall caliber of departments across the university and helping to improve the economy of the state of Maryland.

We have chosen to pursue our graduate studies within the University System of Maryland, contributing our talents to teaching and research at UMD instead of any other university here or internationally. We ask in return that the General Assembly of Maryland afford us the respect it has afforded many other state employees in giving us the right to organize and collectively bargain. Again, I urge lawmakers to support SB 658, which would allow us to present concerns

to the university through formal channels, giving graduate students a voice in creating equitable and supportive living conditions for all.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Valerie Hall  
PhD Student, Anthropology  
Teaching Assistant  
B0104B Taliaferro Bldg  
College Park, MD 20742  
vhall@umd.edu