

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 am writing to urge you to support any legislation which grants collective bargaining rights to graduate employees at institutions of higher education in Maryland. The right of bargaining to represent one's own interests in any situation of employment is necessary in order to avoid being taken advantage of by employers. However, graduate employees unlike any other employees of the state of Maryland have been denied this right.

I am at the start of my second semester as a graduate teaching assistant at UMCP. Though the instructors I have worked for have been understanding for the most part, I do feel I have suffered due to flaws in the current system. The purpose of phd programs is to gain extremely rigorous and specialized training in order to become an expert capable of performing original research. Due to this graduate students are expected to take on a large quantity of rigorous coursework, as well as starting to get involved with research groups as soon as possible. This leads to graduate students putting fifty plus hours per week into their schoolwork. This is by itself a good thing, as graduate students are preparing to become researchers themselves, and thus extremely rigorous academic work is necessary and expected. However, in addition to this we are expected to work twenty hours a week as teaching assistants in order to make a living. On its own this would still not be too big of a problem, however the TA's rarely take up only twenty hours a week. As a personal example, in my current position I am expected to grade three large assignments per student per week. Assuming this grading takes a minimal amount of time (5-8 minutes per assignment) I spend upwards of sixteen hours per week just grading. Compounding that with the six hours spent in the actual lab, the office hours, the preparation, and the weekly meeting, I end up spending an average of twenty five to twenty eight hours per week on my TA (well above the allotted twenty). This serves to severely distract me from my academic work, and my compensation is based on the incorrect assumption that I am working only twenty hours.

As the student population rises every year there is more and more work to be done. As this work level has risen universities have been pushing more and more of it onto their graduate TA's. This leads to us being expected to work well more than the allotted twenty hours per week. As there is only so much time in a day, these increased responsibilities lead to graduate students having to cut time from their academic pursuits (as I have outlined personally above). Advisors and departments however are not happy about this, and thus we are pulled in two different directions. Your advisor is telling you that more time needs to be dedicated to your schoolwork, and the instructor you work for is telling you that you need to get all of your building TA responsibilities taken care of with neither often wanting to budge on deadlines. This not only has an adverse

effect on graduate student mental health, but also comes at the expense of our future abilities as we often simply cannot find enough time to devote to our mastering of the particular subject we are studying.

There is a reason that the right to collectively bargain is given to all other state employees. No matter the specifics of the situation, if a group of workers are not allowed to negotiate on their own behalf, unfair amounts of excess work will be pushed onto them for no additional compensation. For when there is additional work to be done or cuts to be made those in charge will obviously take the path of least resistance, which is to push the work onto those who cannot defend themselves. This is a natural effect of workers lacking representative rights and will never be avoided for graduate student workers unless they are given rights of collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

Kevin Weber  
PHD, Chemical Physics  
Teaching Assistant  
4300 Woodberry Street 20782  
Kevinweber900@gmail.com