

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,

We would like to express our sincere and deep support for graduate student unionization. As re-elected President of our Graduate and Professional Student Senate at the University of Washington, and five years of involvement in GPSS as a grad student on campus, I have experienced first hand the immeasurable benefits of our union, UAW 4121. Colleagues of mine have had to utilize the benefits UAW offers in unfortunate circumstances where their rights as student employees had been infringed upon and where having a third party mediator and advocate was pivotal in their ability to accomplish their work and graduate on time. Other students who have thankfully not needed to utilize the union regularly express the weight lifted off of them, and the sense of ongoing relief, that they are protected should anything unfortunate happen.

Graduate students on our campus are an average age of 32, have been working professionals before returning for an additional degree, are parents and caregivers, and are further professionalizing themselves to contribute more to their families and communities. We may technically be students, but we are professionals who are operating in a professional environment and we have the right to protect our fellow employees of the university. Then, to complicate matters, we also work in close proximity with staff and faculty while teaching and conducting research with undergraduate students. We are perhaps one of the most silent and vulnerable populations on campus considering the number of hats we wear and the fear of retribution we face should we need to stand up for ourselves. The apprenticeship model our university systems are built on does not lend to self-advocacy without repercussions, and as students who rely on others for career development and placement, especially from advisers and other faculty, we need the union as a resource to support us should the interaction of our work, our research, our relationship with faculty become precarious.

We would not have trans-inclusive healthcare without our union. We would not have the financial benefits we live on without our union. We would not feel as safe without our union. We would not be as effective as teachers, researchers, and learners without our union.

We support collective bargaining rights for Maryland graduate and professional students.

Sincerely,

Giuliana Conti  
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